











TALES FROM  
THEOPHILE GAUTIER



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CLARIMONDE

JETTATURA



# AVATAR

## I

No one could understand the malady which was slowly undermining Octave de Saville. He was not confined to his bed; his ordinary existence was unchanged; no complaint fell from his lips; and yet it was none the less evident that he was fading away. Questioned by the physicians whom the solicitations of his friends and relations forced him to consult, he could mention no definite suffering, nor could science discover an alarming symptom: the auscultation of the chest gave out a favorable sound, and the ear applied to the heart detected scarcely an irregular pulsation; he had neither cough nor fever, but life ebbed from him through one of those invisible rents of which, Terence says, man is full.

Sometimes a strange faintness made him white as marble, for a few moments he ap-

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peared lifeless, then the pendulum, no longer stopped by the mysterious finger which had held it, resumed its sway, and Octave awakened as from a dream.

He had been sent to a water-cure, but the thermal nymphs proved powerless to help him, and a journey to Naples produced no better result. The radiant sun, of which he had heard so much, was to him as black as Albert Dürer has engraved it; the bat with *Melancholia* written on its wing beat the dazzling sky with its dusky web, and flew between him and the light; on the quay of Mergellina, where the half-clad lazzaroni sun themselves till their skins take on the hue of bronze, he had felt chilled to the heart. So returning to his small apartment in the Rue Saint-Lazare, he had apparently resumed his former habits.

This apartment was for a bachelor most comfortably furnished. But as in time an interior becomes impressed with the look and even the very thought of its inhabitant, Octave's home had little by little grown dull and mournful; the damask curtains had faded and admitted but a gray light; the large bunches of flowers were

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withering on the dingy white of the carpet; the gilt frames of a few choice water-colors and sketches had slowly reddened under a relentless dust; a discouraged fire smoked and died out under its own ashes; the antique buhl clock, inlaid with brass and tortoise shell, withheld the noise of its tick-tack, and the voice of the dreary hours spoke low as one does in a sick-room; the doors closed silently, and the footfalls of rare visitors died away on the thick carpet; laughter ceased on penetrating these cold, sombre rooms, wherein modern luxury was omnipresent. Octave's servant, Jean, a duster under his arm, a tray in his hand, glided about like a shadow, for, unconsciously, affected by the surrounding gloom, he had ended by losing his natural loquacity. Trophies, such as boxing gloves, masks, and foils, hung on the walls, but it was easy to see that they had long been untouched; books were tossed carelessly about, as if Octave had tried to lull some fixed idea by mechanical reading. An unfinished letter, yellowed with age, seemed to have been awaiting its conclusion for months, and spread itself out on the table

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in silent reproach. Though inhabited, the apartment appeared deserted. Life was absent, and on entering one encountered the chill which issues from a tomb. In this lugubrious dwelling, where no woman ever set her foot, Octave was more at his ease than elsewhere; the silence, the sadness, and the neglect suited him; the joyous tumult of life disgusted him, though he made frequent efforts to join in it; but as he returned from the masquerades, the balls, or the suppers to which his friends dragged him, gloomier than before, he struggled no longer against his mysterious pain, and let the days slip by with the indifference of a man who expects nothing from the morrow. As he had lost faith in the future he made no plans, and having tacitly sent in his resignation to life, he was awaiting its acceptance. Nevertheless, if you imagined him thin of face, with an earthy complexion, attenuated limbs, and a wasted appearance, you would be much mistaken; a dark bruise under the eyelids, an orange shade around the orbits, a hollowing of the temples veined with blue, were alone observable. Yet his eyes were

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soulless, without trace of will, hope, or desire. This lifeless gaze in such a young face formed a strange contrast, and produced a more painful effect than the emaciated features and fevered expression of the ordinary invalid. Before his health was affected in this way Octave had been called a good-looking fellow, and he was so still; thick, wavy black hair clustered in silky, lustrous masses at his temples; his eyes were large, velvety, and deeply blue, fringed with curved lashes, and at times luminous with a liquid fire; in repose, and when unanimated by passion, they had the serene look which the eyes of Orientals wear when, after smoking their nargileh, they take their *kief* at the café doors of Smyrna or Constantinople. His skin, always pale, had that southern tint of olive white which is most effective by gaslight; his hand was slender and delicate; his foot narrow and arched. He dressed well, without being in advance of the fashion or behind it, and knew perfectly how to set off his natural attractions to their best advantage. Though without the pretensions of an exquisite or a sportsman, had he been



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put up at the Jockey Club he would not have been blackballed.

How was it, then, that a man, young, handsome, rich, with every incentive to happiness, should be thus miserably consuming himself? The reader will imagine that Octave was blasé, that the novels of the day had filled his brain with morbid ideas, that he had no beliefs, that of his youth and fortune squandered in dissipation nothing remained to him but debts. All these suppositions would be erroneous. Octave had seen too little of dissipation to be tired of it: neither splenetic, romantic, atheistic, nor libertine, his life had been that of the average young man, a commingling of study and relaxation. In the morning, lectures at the Sorbonne claimed his attention, and in the evening, he might be seen stationed on the staircase of the Opéra watching the tide of beauty disperse. He was not known to take interest in either actress or duchess, and he spent his income without encroaching on the principal,—his lawyer respected him! In brief, he was of an equable temperament,\* incapable of jumping off a precipice, or setting a

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river on fire. The cause of his condition, which baffled the skill of the entire faculty, was so incredible in nineteenth century Paris that we must leave its narration to our hero.

As the ordinary scientists' could make nothing of this strange illness (at the amphitheatres of anatomy a soul has yet to be dissected), an eccentric physician recently returned from India, and reputed to effect marvelous cures, was consulted as a last resource.

Octave, foreseeing a superior discernment capable of penetrating his secret, seemed to dread the doctor's visit, and it was only after repeated entreaties from his mother that he consented to receive M. Balthazar Cherbonneau. When the physician entered, Octave was stretched on a sofa; his head was propped up by a cushion, another supported his elbow, and a third covered his feet: wrapped in the soft and supple folds of a Turkish gown, he was reading, or rather holding, a book, for his eyes, though fixed on a page, saw nothing. His face was colorless, but, as has been hinted, showed no marked alteration. A superficial exami-

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nation would not have disclosed dangerous symptoms in this young invalid, on whose table, instead of the pills, vials, potions, and other drugs usual in such cases, stood a box of cigars. Though slightly drawn, his clear-cut features had lost little of their natural charm, and but for his extreme debility and the irremediable despondency of his eye Octave would have appeared in a normal state of health.

In spite of his apathy Octave was struck by the physician's fantastic appearance. M. Balthazar Cherbonneau seemed as though he had escaped from one of Hoffmann's Tales, and was wandering about astounded at the reality of his own grotesqueness. His sunburnt face was overhung by an enormous skull, which loss of hair made appear even larger than it really was. The bald cranium, polished as ivory, had remained white, while the face, exposed to the rays of the sun, had taken on the color of old oak or a smoky portrait. Its cavities and projecting bones were thrown in such bold relief that their slight covering of wrinkled flesh resembled damp parchment stretched on a death's head. The infrequent gray

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hairs which still lingered on the back of the head were gathered in three thin locks, —two drawn up over the ears, and the third, starting from the nape of the neck and ending abruptly at the beginning of the forehead, crowned this nut-cracker countenance, and evoked unconscious regrets for the ancient peruque or the modern wig. But the most extraordinary thing about him was his eyes. His face, wrinkled with age, calcinated by incandescent skies, worn with vigils, marked in lines more closely pressed than the pages of a book, with the wearisome fatigues of life and of study, was illuminated by two orbs of turquoise blue, inconceivably limpid, fresh, and youthful. Sunken in sombre sockets, whose concentric membranes and pink edges vaguely recalled the dilating and contracting pupils of an owl, they gleamed like two blue stars, and made one suspect that, aided by some witchery of the Brahmans, the physician had stolen the eyes of a child, and transplanted them to his own cadaverous visage. Octave's eyes were those of an octogenarian, but Cherbonneau's blazed with the fire of youth. He was dressed in

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the physician's ordinary garb, a suit of black with silk waistcoat of the same color, while his shirt-front was ornamented with a large diamond, the present of some rajah or nabob. But, as if suspended from a peg, his clothes hung on him in perpendicular folds, broken, when he was seated, into sharp angles by his limbs. India's devouring sun could hardly have been the only cause of the phenomenal emaciation which he exhibited. It may be that in view of some initiation he had undergone the prolonged fasts of the fakirs, and had been extended by the yogis between four glowing braziers on the skin of a gazelle. His attenuation, however, was not the outcome of debility. His fleshless knuckles moved noiselessly, as were they held together by strong ligaments stretched on the hands like the strings of a violin.

With a stiff movement of the elbows which resembled the folding of a yard-measure, the physician seated himself in the chair by the sofa to which Octave motioned him, betraying, as he did so, an inveterate habit of squatting on a mat. So placed, M. Cherbonneau's back was turned

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to the light which fell directly on the face of his patient, a situation most favorable to examination, and one usually chosen by observers more desirous of seeing than of being seen. Though the physician's face was hidden in shadow, and the top of his cranium, round and polished as a gigantic ostrich-egg, alone caught a ray of light, Octave discerned the scintillation of his singular blue pupils, which appeared endowed with the glimmer peculiar to phosphorescent bodies, and emitted a clear, sharp beam which penetrated the invalid's chest with the hot, pricking sensation which an emetic causes.

"Well, sir," said the physician after a moment's silence, during which he seemed to sum up the symptoms noted in his rapid inspection, "I see already that yours is not a case of everyday pathology. You have none of the well-known signs of catalogued maladies which the physician cures or aggravates; and I shall not ask you for paper, or write from the codex a soothing prescription with a hieroglyphical signature for a tail-piece, or trouble your servant to go to the corner drug-shop." Oc-

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tave smiled faintly as if to thank M. Cherbonneau for sparing him useless and disagreeable remedies.

“But,” resumed the physician, “do not rejoice too quickly; because you have neither heart-disease, consumption, spinal complaint, softening of the brain, typhoid or nervous fever, it does not follow that you are in good health. Give me your hand.”

Thinking M. Cherbonneau wished to count his pulse, and expecting to see him take out his watch for that purpose, Octave drew back the sleeve of his dressing-gown, and baring his wrist extended it mechanically. Into his yellow paw, of which the bony fingers resembled the claws of a crab, M. Cherbonneau took the young man's moist, veined hand, but instead of feeling with his thumb for that uneven pulsation which indicates that the machinery of man is out of order, he pressed and kneaded it as if to put himself in magnetic communication with his subject.

Though a skeptic in medicine, Octave could not restrain a sort of anxious emotion. The blood receded from his temples,

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and it seemed to him as if the physician's pressure was subtracting his very soul.

"My dear sir," M. Cherbonneau said, as he dropped Octave's hand, "your condition is far graver than you think; the old-fashioned treatments that are in vogue in Europe cannot aid you in the least. You have lost the will to live; insensibly, your soul is slipping from your body; yet there is no trace of hypochondria, lymphomania, nor yet of melancholy and suicidal preoccupation. No! There is nothing of that. Strange as it may appear, you might, did I not prevent you, succumb suddenly, without a single noticeable rupture internal or external. It is high time that I was summoned, for your spirit holds to your body merely by a thread; we will make a good strong knot of it, however." And therewith the doctor rubbed his hands blithesomely together, and smiled in a manner that sent the wrinkles eddying through the thousand lines of his weather-worn face.

"Monsieur Cherbonneau," Octave answered, "I do not know whether you will succeed, and as to that I care very little;



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but I must admit that you have gauged the cause of my mysterious affliction in the exactest and most penetrating manner. I feel as though I had become permeable, as though I were losing my ego as water runs through a sieve. I am melting away into the universal essence, and it is with difficulty that I distinguish my own identity from the surroundings into which it is being fused. Life, of which, as well as may be, I perform the daily pantomime to avoid grieving my relatives and friends, seems so far from me that there are moments when I feel as if I had already left this mortal sphere. Actuated by habitual motives whose mechanical impulse still lingers, I come and go, but without participating in my own actions. At the usual hours I seat myself at table, and appear to eat and drink; but the most highly seasoned dishes and the strongest wines have no flavor to me. The sunshine is pale as moonlight, and candle-flames are dark. I shiver in mid-summer. Often an intense silence oppresses me, much as though my heart had ceased beating, and the wheelwork was clogged by some unknown cause. If the

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dead are sentient, my condition must resemble theirs."

"You have," replied the physician, "a chronic inability to live, an entirely moral disease, and one more frequent than is supposed. Thought is a force which can kill as surely as electricity or prussic acid, though the signs of its ravages cannot be grasped by the means of such analysis as is at the disposal of vulgar science. What sorrow has set its fangs in your heart? From what secretly ambitious height have you fallen crushed and broken? On what despair do you muse in your immobility? Is it the thirst for power which torments you? Have you voluntarily renounced an aim placed too high for human attainment? You are very young for that. May it be that a woman has betrayed you?"

"No, doctor," continued Octave; "I have not even enjoyed that happiness."

"And yet," continued M. Balthazar Cherbonneau, "in your dull eyes, in the listless attitude of your body, in the lifeless tones of your voice, I read, as plainly as if it were stamped in gold letters on a morocco bind-

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ing, the title of one of Shakespeare's plays."

"And what is this play which I unconsciously translate?" asked Octave, whose curiosity was aroused in spite of himself.

"Love's Labor's Lost," continued the doctor, with a purity of accent which betrayed a long residence in the English colonies of India.

Octave did not answer; a slight blush reddened his cheeks, and to cover his embarrassment he toyed with the tassel of his girdle. The physician crossed one leg over the other, producing the effect of the crossbones carved on tombs, and clasped his foot in his hand in Oriental fashion. His blue eyes gazed into Octave's with a look at once soft and imperious.

"Come, come," said M. Balthazar Cheronneau, "confide in me; souls are my specialty; you are my patient; and, like the Catholic priest to the penitent, I ask for a complete confession, and you can make it without kneeling."

"What good would it do? Supposing that you have divined correctly, the telling of my affliction would not relieve it. My

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sorrow is dumb. No earthly power, not even yours, can cure me."

"Perhaps," said the physician, settling himself more comfortably in his arm-chair, as if preparing to listen to a long confidence.

"I do not wish you," continued Octave, "to accuse me of a puerile obstinacy, nor to give you by my silence a pretext for washing your hands of my death; so, since you ask it, I will tell you my history: you have guessed the main point, I need not spare the details. Do not expect anything singular or romantic. It is a very simple adventure, very commonplace, very threadbare; but, as sings Henri Heine, whose meets it finds it ever new, though the heart be broken every time. Really, I am ashamed to relate such an ordinary tale to a man who has lived in the most fabulous and chimerical countries."

"Do not fear," said the physician, smiling, "it is only the commonplace which can be extraordinary to me."

"Well, doctor, love is killing me."

## II

“TOWARDS the end of the summer of 184— I found myself in Florence, at the best season for seeing that city. I had time, money, excellent letters of introduction, and I was a good-humored youth, only too ready to be amused. I installed myself on the Lung’-Arno, hired a trap, and drifted into that easy Florentine life which is so full of charm to the stranger. In the morning I visited some church, palace, or gallery, quite leisurely, without hurry, as I did not wish to give myself that indigestion of master-pieces which disgusts the too hasty tourist with art. One morning I examined the bronze doors of the Baptistery; another, the Perseus of Benvenuto under the Loggia dei Lanzi, the portrait of Fornarina, or Canova’s Venus in the Pitti Palace, but never more than one object at a time. Then I breakfasted off a cup of

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iced coffee at the Café Doney, smoked a cigar or two, glanced at the papers, and, my buttonhole decorated, willingly or not, by one of the pretty flower-girls who in their huge straw hats stand before the café, I returned home for a siesta. At three o'clock the carriage came to take me to the Cascine. The Cascine is to Florence what the Bois de Boulogne is to Paris, with this difference, that every one is acquainted, and the square is an open-air drawing-room, where chairs are replaced by the half circle of carriages. The women, in full dress, recline on the cushions, and receive the visits of lovers, friends, exquisites, and attachés, who pose, hat in hand, at the carriage-steps. But you know all this as well as I. There plans for the evening are made, meetings are arranged, answers are given, invitations accepted; it is like a Pleasure Exchange open from three to five in the shade of beautiful trees, under the world's fairest sky. It is incumbent on every one of the least consequence to be seen there daily, and I was careful not to miss it. In the evening I made a visit or two, or if the prima donna

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was an attraction I went to the Pergola.

“In this way I spent one of the happiest months of my life; but my good fortune was not destined to last. One day a magnificent open carriage made its first appearance at the Cascine. It was one of Laurenzi’s *chef-d’œuvres*, and a superb example of Viennese manufacture; glittering with varnish, and blazoned with an almost royal coat of arms, there was harnessed to it as handsome a pair of horses as ever paraded in Hyde Park, or drew up before St. James’ Palace during a drawing-room; added to this, it was driven à la Daumont in the correctest style by a youthful postilion in green livery and white knee-breeches. The brass on the harness, the boxes of the wheels, the door-handles, all shone like gold and sparkled in the sun; every eye followed this splendid equipage, which, after making a curve as regular as if traced by a compass, drew up near the other vehicles. The carriage, you may be sure, was not empty; but in the speed with which it passed nothing had been distinguished but the tip of a slipper extended

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on a cushion, a large fold of shawl, and the disk of a parasol fringed with white silk. The parasol was now closed, and a woman of incomparable beauty was revealed. Being on horseback, I was able to approach near enough to lose no detail of this poem in flesh. The fair stranger, with the assurance of a perfect blonde, wore a gown of that silvery Nile green which makes any woman whose skin is not irreproachable look as dark as that of a mole. A beautiful shawl of white crêpe de Chine, thick with embroidery of the same color, enveloped her like a Phidian statue in its clinging, ruffled drapery, while a bonnet of fine Florentine straw, covered with forget-me-nots and delicate aquatic plants of slender glaucous leaves, formed an aureole about her face. Her only ornament was a gold lizard studded with turquoises, which encircled the arm that held the parasol.

“Forgive me, doctor, this fashion-plate description. To a lover these trivialities are of enormous importance. Thick, rippling golden hair lay like undulations of light in luxuriant waves upon her brow,



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which itself was smooth and white as the new-fallen snow on the highest Alpine peak; long lashes, fine as the threads of gold radiating from the angel heads in the miniatures of the Middle Ages, veiled her eyes, whose pupils had the bluish-green light of a sun-pierced glacier. Her divinely modeled mouth glowed with the carmine of a sea-shell, and her cheeks resembled white roses flushed by the wooing of the nightingale or the kiss of the butterfly; no mortal brush could copy the sauvity, the fairness, and the immaterial transparency of this complexion, of which the tints seemed hardly due to the blood which colors our coarser skins; the first blush of morn on the ridge of the Sierra Nevada, the rose-tipped petals of a camellia, Parian marble seen through a pink gauze veil, can alone give of it a vague idea. The creamy iridescence of the neck, visible between the shawl and the bonnet strings, gleamed with opalescent reflections. It was the Venetian coloring, and not the features, that arrested attention, though the latter were as clear cut and exquisite as the profile of an antique cameo. When I saw her, I forgot my

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past loves, as Romeo at sight of Juliet forgot Rosalind. The pages of my heart became blank: every name, every memory, was obliterated. I wondered how the commonplace love affairs which few young men escape had ever had any attraction for me, and I reproached myself for them as if they had been culpable infidelities. A new life dated for me from this fatal encounter.

“Presently the carriage left the Cascine and took the road back to town. When the dazzling vision had vanished I brought my horse alongside that of an amiable young Russian, a great lover of watering places, a man who had frequented all the cosmopolitan drawing-rooms of Europe, and who was thoroughly conversant with the traveling contingent of high life; I turned the conversation on the fair stranger, and learned that she was known as the Countess Prascovie Labinska, a Lithuanian of illustrious birth and great fortune, whose husband had been fighting for two years in the Caucasian war.

“It is needless to tell you what diplomacy I used to be received by the countess, who, in view of her husband’s absence, was

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necessarily circumspect in her receptions. At last, however, I was admitted; two dowager princesses and four aged baronesses answering for me on their ancient virtue.

“The Countess Labinska had taken, a mile or so from Florence, a magnificent villa, a former belonging of the Salviati family, and in a short space of time had filled the mediæval manor with every modern comfort without in the least disturbing its severe beauty and serious elegance. Heavy blazoned portières were in fit keeping with the vaulted arches from which they fell; the easy-chairs and other furniture of quaint and curious shapes harmonized with the sombre wainscoted walls and the frescoes dulled and faded to the hues of old tapestry; and through it all there was not a note that jarred. The present did not clash with the past. The countess was so naturally the châtelaine that the old palace seemed built as her appropriate setting.

“Fascinated as I had been by the countess’ radiant beauty, at the end of several visits I was yet more charmed by her bril-

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liant and subtle mind. When the conversation was of interest, her soul shone luminous in her eyes, the pallor of her cheek glowed with an inner flame as does a lamp of alabaster: the phosphorescent scintillations, the quivering of light of which Dante speaks in his description of the splendors of Paradise, were illustrated in her appearance, as who should say an angel thrown in bright relief against a sun. I stood bewildered, stupefied, and ecstatic. Lost in contemplation of her beauty, enchanted by the celestial tones of her voice, which made of every sentence ineffable music, I stammered, when obliged to speak, a few incoherent words, which must have given her a poor idea of my intelligence, and sometimes at certain phrases which denoted on my part either great embarrassment or incurable imbecility an imperceptible smile of friendly irony danced like a rose-colored ripple over her charming lips.

“Still I had not told my love, for in her presence I was without thought, strength, or courage; only my heart throbbed as would it break its bonds and fling itself at the knees of its sovereign. Twenty times

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I had determined to explain myself, but an insurmountable timidity restrained me; the least look of coldness or reserve from the countess threw me into a deathly trance comparable to that of the condemned who, bowed on the block, await the stroke of the axe that is to sever the head from the body. I was strangled by nervous contractions; I was bathed in an icy perspiration. I reddened, I grew pale, and without having dared to speak I came away, finding the door with difficulty, and staggering down the steps of the house like a drunkard. Once outside I came to my senses, and threw to the wind the most inflamed dithyrambs. I addressed to my absent idol a thousand declarations of an irresistible eloquence. In these mute apostrophes I equaled Love's greatest poets. The vertiginous perfume of the Orient, the poetry of Solomon's Song of Songs, hallucinated with hashish, the platonic subtleties and ethereal delicacy of Petrarch's sonnets, the nervous and delirious sensibility of Heine's 'Intermezzo,' could not compare with the exhaustless effusions of the soul in which my life wasted itself away. At the end of

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each monologue it seemed to me that the countess, vanquished, at last, must descend from the heavens to my heart, and frequently I clasped my arms to my bosom, thinking to enfold her in them.

“I was so completely possessed that I spent hours in murmuring like a litany of love the two words,—Prascovie Labinska; and in these syllables, dropped slowly like pearls, or repeated with the feverish volubility of a devotee exalted by prayer, I found an indefinable charm. Then again, I wrote the adored name on the finest parchment, illuminating it like a mediæval manuscript with flowered designs and traceries of azure and gold. In this work of pathetic minuteness and puerile perfection I passed the long hours which separated my visits to the countess. I could not read or otherwise occupy myself. Nothing but Prascovie interested me, and even my letters from France lay unopened. I made repeated efforts to overcome this condition; I tried to recall the axioms of seduction accepted by young men, the stratagems used by the Valmonts of the Café de Paris and the Don Juans of the Jockey

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Club; but to execute them my heart failed me, and I regretted that I had not, like Stendhal's Julien Sorel, a package of progressive epistles which I could copy and send to the countess. Unfortunately, I could only surrender myself, without the power to ask a return, without even a hope in the future; indeed, in my most audacious dreams I hardly dared touch with my lips the tips of Prascovie's rosy fingers. A fifteenth-century novice prostrate on the steps of an altar, a chevalier kneeling in his rigid armor, could not have had a more self-annihilating adoration for the Virgin."

M. Balthazar Cherbonneau had listened to Octave with profound attention; for to him the young man's story was not merely a tale of romance, and he murmured, during a pause in the narrative, as if to himself, "Yes, that is certainly a diagnostic of love, a curious malady which I have encountered but once,—at Chandernagore,—in a young Pariah in love with a Brahman; it killed her, poor girl, but she was a savage; you, M. Octave, you are a civilized being, and we will cure you." This parenthesis concluded, he motioned M. de Saville

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to continue; and, doubling back his leg to the thigh, like the articulated limb of a grasshopper, so as to support his chin on his knee, he settled himself in this position, impossible to any one else, but which to him appeared very restful.

“I do not want to bore you with the details of my secret martyrdom,” resumed Octave; “I will hasten to a decisive scene. One day, unable to restrain my imperious desire to see the countess, I went to her before the hour at which she was accustomed to receive. The weather was heavy and overcast. Mme. Labinska was not in the salon. She was seated under a portico, which was supported by graceful columns, and opened on a terrace, from which one descended to the garden; she had had her piano, a wicker lounge, and a few chairs brought out, and jardinières filled with splendid flowers (nowhere are they so fresh and odorous as in Florence) stood between the columns, and impregnated with their perfume the infrequent breezes which came from the Apennines. In front, through the openings of the arcades, one could see the well-pruned yew and box trees,



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peopled with mythological statues in the labored style of Baccia Bandinelli or of Ammanato, and here and there a tall centenary cypress. In the dim distance rose the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore, and the square belfry of Palazza Vecchio jutted above the silhouette of the town.

“The countess was alone, and reclining on her lounge; never had I thought her so beautiful; in indolent languor she lay like a water nymph, billowed in the foamy whiteness of an ample India-muslin gown that was bordered with a frothy trimming which resembled the silvery edge of a wave, and clasped at the throat by an exquisitely chased Khorassan brooch. In brief, her costume was as airy as the drapery which floats about the figure of Victory. Her arms, fairer than the alabaster in which Florentine sculptors copy antique statues, issued from wide sleeves open to the shoulder like pistils from a flower chalice; a broad black sash knotted at the waist with falling ends contrasted sharply with all this whiteness; but the melancholy effect which these shades ascribed to mourning might have given was enlivened by

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the point of a tiny Circassian slipper of blue morocco figured with yellow arabesques, which peeped from beneath her skirt.

“The countess’ blonde hair, slightly raised as if by a passing zephyr, revealed her smooth forehead and transparent temples, and formed a nimbus, through which the light glittered in a shower of gold.

“On a chair near by, a large hat of rice straw, trimmed with long black ribbons, similar to those on her dress, fluttered in the breeze, and by it was a pair of unworn gloves of Swedish kid. On my arrival Prascovie closed the book she was reading,—the poems of Mickiewicz,—and gave me a kindly nod; she was alone, a circumstance as uncommon as it was favorable. I seated myself opposite her on the chair she designated, and for some minutes one of those silences fell upon us which are so painful if prolonged. None of the commonplaces of conversation came to my aid; my thoughts were confused, waves of flame rose from my heart to my eyes, and my passion cried, ‘Do not lose this opportunity.’

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“I do not know what I might have done if the countess, divining the cause of my emotion, had not partly risen, and extended her beautiful hand as though to close my mouth.

“Not a word, Octave. You love me, I know, I feel, I believe it; nor does it anger me, for love is involuntary. Stricter women than I would be offended, but I pity you because I cannot return it, and it pains me to be the cause of your unhappiness. I regret that we should have met, and blame the whim which made me leave Venice for Florence. At first I hoped that my persistent coldness would weary and estrange you, but nothing rebuffs true love, of which I see all the signs in your eyes. Do not let my sympathy arouse in you either dreams or illusions; nor must you take it as an encouragement. An angel with diamond shield and flaming sword protects me more surely than religion, duty, or virtue against every seduction; and this angel is my love: I adore the Count Labinski. I have had the good fortune to make a love-match.’

“A flood of tears burst from my eyes

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at this frank, loyal, yet modest avowal, and I felt the spring of life break within me.

“Prascovic rose in extreme agitation, and, with a motion of gracious feminine pity, pressed her delicate handkerchief to my eyes.

“‘There, do not weep,’ she said; ‘I forbid it. Try to divert your thoughts; imagine that I have forever disappeared, that I am dead; forget me. Travel, work, do good; mingle actively in the tide of life; console yourself with art or love’ . . . At this I interrupted her with a gesture.

“‘Do you think,’ she asked, ‘you would suffer less in continuing to see me? If so, come. I will always receive you. God says we must pardon our enemies; why, then, should we ill-treat those who love us? Nevertheless, absence seems to me a more certain remedy. In two years we can shake hands without danger—for you,’ she added, attempting a smile.

“The next day I left Florence; but neither study, travel, nor time has diminished my suffering. I am dying: do not prevent it, doctor!”

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“Have you seen the countess since?” asked the physician, with an odd sparkle in his blue eyes.

“No,” answered Octave, “but she is in Paris,” and he extended a card on which was engraved:

*The Countess Prascovic Labinska. And in a corner, Thursdays.*

### III

AMONG the infrequent passers who follow the Avenue Gabriel from the Turkish Embassy to the Elysée Bourbon, and prefer the silence, solitude, and fragrant calm of this avenue to the dusty whirl and noisy elegance of the Champs-Elysées, there are few who would not pause with mingled feelings of admiration and envy before a poetic and mysterious dwelling where for once felicity seemed to be lodged by wealth.

Who is there who has not halted at the railing of a park and gazed attentively through the green foliage at some white villa, and then passed on with heavy heart, as if the dream of his life lay hidden behind the walls? Then, again, other dwellings seen thus from the outside cause an indefinable melancholy. The gray gloom of desertion and despair has settled upon them and blighted the tops of the surrounding

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trees; the statues are moss-stained, the flowers droop, the water stagnates in the fountain; in spite of the rake, the paths are overrun with weeds, and if there are birds they are dumb.

The gardens on the Avenue Gabriel are separated from the sidewalk by a hedge, and extend in strips of varying size to the houses which face the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. The one alluded to ended at the street in an embankment supporting a wall of rocks chosen for the curious irregularity of their shape. The sides of this wall, being much higher than the centre, formed a rough, dark frame for the radiant landscape set between. The crevices of the rocks held soil enough to nourish the roots of rich plants and flowers, whose variegated verdure was thrown into relief against the sombre hue of the stone. No artist could have created a more effective foreground.

The walls that inclosed the sides of this miniature paradise disappeared under a curtain of climbing plants, of which the stalks, shoots, and tendrils formed a trellis of green. Thanks to this arrangement, the

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garden resembled an opening in a forest, rather than a narrow grass plot shut in the limits of civilization.

Just behind the rock-work stood several groups of slender trees, whose thick foliage contrasted picturesquely. Beyond them spread a plot of turf, without an uneven spear of grass. Finer, softer than the velvet of a queen's mantle, it was of that ideal green rarely obtained, except before the steps of a feudal English manor; a natural carpet on which the eye loves to rest, and the foot fears to crush; an emerald rug where, during the day, the pet gazelle frolics in the sun with the lace-frocked scion of an hundred earls, and where by moonlight a Titania of the West End glides hand in hand with an Oberon inscribed in the peerage. A path of sand, sifted through a sieve that no bit of shell or edge of flint should fret the aristocratic foot, circled like a yellow ribbon around this thick, smooth lawn, which, leveled by the roller, was moistened even in the dryest days of summer with the artificial rain of the sprinkler. At the end of the grass-plot blazed a bed of geraniums, a display of



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flowery fireworks, whose scarlet stars flamed against a dark mass of heath.

The charming façade of the house closed the perspective. Slim Ionic pillars, and a classical roof surmounted at each corner by graceful marble statues, gave it the appearance of a Greek temple transported by the fancy of a millionaire, and subdued, by a suggestion of art and poetry, all that might otherwise have seemed ostentatious luxury; between the pillars awnings slashed with crimson were usually lowered, shading and defining the windows which opened, at full length, like glass doors, under the portico.

When the capricious sky of Paris deigned to stretch a bit of blue behind this dainty palace it looked so lovely in its thicket of verdure that it might easily have been taken for the abode of a fairy queen, or for one of Baron's pictures enlarged.

Extending into the garden from each side of the house were two conservatories, whose crystal panes, set in gilt, sparkled in the sun, and gave to a world of the rarest exotic plants the illusion of their native air.

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A matutinal poet strolling in the Avenue Gabriel at dawn would have heard the nightingale trilling the last notes of his nocturne, and seen the blackbird in his yellow slippers quite at home in the garden walks. At night, in the silence of the sleeping city, when the roll of carriages returning from the Opéra has ceased, the same poet might have dimly distinguished a white-robed form clinging to the arm of a young and handsome man, and he would certainly have returned to his solitary attic sad and depressed.

The reader, doubtless, divines that here lived the Countess Prascovie Labinska and her husband. Count Olaf Labinski had returned from the Caucasian war after a glorious campaign, in which, if he had not fought face to face with the mystical and intangible Schamyl, at least he had attacked the most devout and fanatic Mourides of the illustrious Sheik. He avoided bullets as only the brave can, by rushing to meet them, and the curved scimiters of the warlike barbarians had broken on his chest without so much as scratching him. Courage is a flawless cuirass. The Count

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Labinski possessed the mad valor of the Slav races, who love danger for its own sake, and to whom can be applied the refrain of an old Scandinavian song: "They kill, die, and laugh!"

The rapture with which husband and wife, to whom marriage was a passion sanctioned by God and man, were reunited could only be described by Thomas Moore in the style of the "Loves of the Angels"! To portray it, each drop of ink would have to be transformed to a drop of light, and each word evaporate on the paper with the flame and the perfume of a grain of incense. What picture is possible of souls melted in one like two dew-drops which, dissolving on a lily petal, meet, blend, absorb one another, and form but a single gem?

Happiness is so rare in this world that man has not thought to invent words to depict it, while on the other hand the vocabulary of suffering, moral and physical, fills innumerable columns in the dictionaries of all languages.

Lovers, even in childhood, the hearts of Olaf and Prascovic had never throbbed to

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other names. In fact, knowing almost from the cradle that they were destined for each other, the rest of the world was but landscape to them. One might have said that they were the twin halves of Plato's Androgyne, which, seeking each other since the primeval divorce, were at last united and joined together. In short, they formed that duality in unity which is known as perfect harmony; and, side by side, they marched, or rather sped, through life with an equal impulse, sustained and impelled, as Dante has it, "like two doves beckoned by the same desire."

That nothing might disturb this felicity, a colossal fortune enveloped it in an atmosphere of gold. When this radiant couple appeared, Misery, consoled, shed its rags, and dried its tears; for Olaf and Prascovie had the noble egotism of happiness, and could not endure affliction amid their own delight.

Since polytheism has disappeared, and with it the young gods, the smiling genii, the celestial youths whose forms were absolute in perfection, harmonious in rhythm, and perfect in idealism, and since ancient

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Greece no longer chants the hymn to beauty in Parian strophes, man has cruelly abused his permission to be ill-favored. Although fashioned in God's image, he is but a poor likeness of him.

The Count Labinski, however, had not profited by this license. His face was an elongated oval; his nose was clearly and boldly cut; his mouth firmly outlined and accentuated by a pointed blonde mustache; his chin, cleft by a dimple, was ever raised; while his black eyes, through a striking and pleasing singularity, caused him to look like one of the warrior angels, St. Michael or Raphael, who, mailed in gold, combated the devil. In fact, he would have been too handsome were it not for the virile light which shone from the dark iris of his eyes, and the shade of bronze that the sun of Asia had spread over his features.

The count was of middle height, slight, graceful, nervous, concealing, beneath an apparent delicacy, muscles of steel. When for some embassy ball he donned a magnate's costume, that was embossed with gold, glittered with diamonds, and embroidered with pearls, he passed through the

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throng like a shining apparition, exciting the jealousy of the men and the admiration of the women, to whom, be it said, Prascovie rendered him indifferent. We need not add that the count was as intelligent as he was handsome; the good fairies had visited his cradle, and the evil witch who spoils everything was in a good humor that day.

It is easy to understand that with such a rival Octave de Saville stood a poor chance, and also, that he was sensible in allowing himself to expire quietly on the cushions of his sofa, and that, too, despite the hope with which the fantastic physician, Balthazar Cherbonneau attempted to revivify his heart. The only way was to forget Prascovie, and that was impossible. To see her was evidently useless. Octave felt that the countess' resolution would never weaken in its gentle implacability and compassionate coldness. He was afraid that in the presence of his innocent and beloved assassin his wounds might reopen and bleed, and he did not wish to accuse her.

## IV

Two years had passed since the day when the Countess Labinska had prevented Octave from making the declaration of love to which she had no right to listen. Awakened from his dream, Octave had taken his departure a prey to the blackest despair, and had not since communicated with her. The one word he would have wished to write was forbidden. Surprised at his silence, the countess' thoughts had frequently and sorrowfully turned to her unfortunate admirer: had he forgotten her? The simplicity of her nature made her hope that he had, without being able to believe that he had really done so, for the light of inextinguishable passion which blazed in Octave's eyes was not of a character to be misinterpreted. Love and the gods are recognized at first sight. The limpid azure of her content was slightly clouded by this

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knowledge, and it inspired her with the tender melancholy of the angels who, in heaven, have yet a thought for earth. Her gentle spirit suffered that she should be the cause of pain; but what can the golden star shining on high do for the obscure shepherd holding up his mortal arms. In mythological times it is true Diana descended in silvery rays upon the sleeping Endymion, but then Diana was not married to a Polish count.

The Countess Labinska, upon her arrival in Paris, had sent Octave the commonplace invitation which Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau was twirling abstractedly between his fingers. Though she had wished him to come to see her, yet when he failed to do so she said to herself with a feeling of involuntary joy, "He loves me still!" She was a woman of angelic purity, and chaste as the uppermost snow of the Himalayas; but God himself in the depth of the infinite has to distract him from the monotony of eternity only the pleasure of hearing the beating heart of some poor, perishable creature on a puny globe that is itself lost in the immensities of space. Prascovie was



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not sterner than God, and Count Olaf could not have censured this delicate voluptuousness of the soul.

“Your story, to which I have listened attentively,” said the physician to Octave, “proves to me that all hope on your part would be chimerical. The countess will never share your love.”

“You see, Monsieur Cherbonneau, that I was right in not trying to retain my ebbing life.”

“I said,” the physician continued, “that ordinary remedies were useless. But, in lands which the stupidity of civilization regards as barbarous there are occult powers, of which contemporary science is absolutely ignorant. In those lands primitive man in his first contact with the vivifying forces of nature acquired a knowledge which is believed to have since been lost, a knowledge which the migrating tribes, the founders of races, were unable to preserve. This knowledge, handed down from initiate to initiate in the dumb recesses of temples, was subsequently confided to hieroglyphics paneled across the walls of the Elloran crypt in sacred idioms,

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unintelligible to the vulgar. But on the summit of Meru,—the cradle of the Ganges, at the foot of the marble stairs of the holy city of Benares, in depths of the ruined pagodas of Ceylon, aged Brahmans are to be seen deciphering forgotten manuscripts, yogis, who, unconscious of the birds that nest in their hair, pass their lives in repeating the ineffable syllable Om, and fakirs whose shoulders still bear the cicatrices of the Juggernaut's iron stamp. These are the ultimate depositaries of the lost arcana, and it is they who, when they so deign, are able with their esoteric lore to produce the most marvelous effects.

“The materialism of Europe has not the faintest conception of the spirituality which the Hindus have reached: the protracted fasts, the self-absorption, the impossible attitudes maintained for years together, attenuate their bodies to such an extent that to see them crouched beneath a molten sun, between glowing braziers, their long nails buried in the palms of their hands, one might fancy they were Egyptian mummies withdrawn from their tombs, and bent double in apelike

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positions. Their mortal envelope is but a chrysalis, which the immortal butterfly, the soul, can abandon or resume at will. While their meagre form, inert and hideous, lies like a night moth surprised by the dawn, their untrammelled spirit rises on the wings of hallucination through incalculable distances to the spheres of the supernatural. They are visited by dreams and visions; from one ecstasy to another they follow the undulations that the ages make as they sink and subside in the oceans of eternity. To them the infinite delivers up its secrets; they assist at the creation of worlds, at the genesis and metamorphosis of gods; they recall the sciences that have been engulfed in plutonian and diluvian cataclysms, the unremembered relations of man and of nature. When in this condition they mumble words that no child of earth has lisped for æons; they intercept the primordial tongue, the Logos which made light spring from the archaic shadows. They are regarded as madmen; they are almost gods!"

This singular preamble aroused Octave's attention to the last degree. He was un-

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able to understand what connection there could be between his love for the countess and the mummeries of the Hindus, and, in consequence, his eyes bristled with interrogation points. His state of mind was divined by the physician who, waving aside his questions with a gesture as who should say, Be patient, you will see in a moment that I am not digressing, continued as follows:—

“Outwearied of questioning, scalpel in hand, the dumb corpses in the amphitheatres, corpses that disclosed but death to me who sought life, I formed the project,—and one, be it said, as audacious as that of Prometheus who scaled the heavens to rob them of fire,—I formed the project of intercepting and surprising the soul, of analyzing and dissecting it, if I may so express myself. I passed over the effect; I looked for the cause; and therewith conceived an immense disdain for the self-evident nothingness of materialism.

“To work over a fortuitous combination of evanescent molecules seemed to me worthy only of a vulgar empiric. I attempted to undo with magnetism the bands

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that join mind and matter. In experiments that were certainly prodigious, but which failed to satisfy me, I surpassed Mesmer, Deslon, Maxwell, Puységur, and Deleuze: Catelepsy, somnambulism, clairvoyance, soul projection, in fact, all the effects which are incomprehensible to the masses, though simple enough to me, I produced at will. Nay, I did more; from the ecstasies of Cardan and St. Thomas of Aquinas I ascended to the self-abstraction of the Pythians; I penetrated the mysteries of the Greeks; the arcana of the Hebrews; I pierced the innermost wisdom of Trophonius and Æsculapius, and therewithal, I found in their now traditional miracles that by a gesture, a word, a glance, by mere volition or some other unknown agent, the soul would shrink or expand. One by one I repeated all the miracles of Apollonius of Tyana. Yet still my ambition was unfulfilled; the soul escaped me; I could feel it, hear it, act upon it, but between it and myself there was a veil of flesh that I could not draw aside. Did I do so, the soul had vanished. I was like the bird-catcher who holds a bird beneath a net which he dare not raise

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lest his winged prey shall mount the sky  
and escape him.

“I went, therefore, to India. In that land of archaic wisdom I hoped to find the solution of the riddle. I learned Sanskrit and Prakrit, the idioms of the erudite, and the language of the people. I enabled myself to converse with Pundits and Brahmans. I crossed the tiger-haunted jungles. I skirted the sacred lakes possessed of crocodiles. I forced my way through impenetrable forests, scattering the bats and monkeys before my path, and at times, in a byway made by savage beasts, I halted abruptly face to face with an elephant. And all this to reach the hut of some far-famed yogi, one in communication with the Mahatmas; and near him I would sit for days sharing his gazelle skin, and noting the vague incantations that fell from his black, cracked lips. In this manner I caught the all-powerful words, the evoking formulas, the syllables of the creating Logos.

“In the interior recesses of pagodas that no eye save that of the initiate has seen, but which the garb of a Brahman permitted

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me to penetrate, I studied the symbolic sculptures. I read many of the cosmological mysteries, many of the legends of lost civilizations. I discovered the meaning of the emblems that the hybrid gods, profuse as Indian vegetation, clutch in their multiple hands. I meditated over Brahma's circle, Vishnu's lotus, the cobra de capello of the blue god Siro. Ganesa unrolling her pachyderm trunk, and winking her small eyes fringed with long lashes, seemed to smile at my efforts and encourage my researches. Each one of these monstrous figures appeared to whisper in their language of stone: 'We are but forms; it is the Spirit that stirs.'

"A priest of the Temple of Tirunamalay, to whom I disclosed my intentions, told me of a yogi who dwelt in one of the grottoes of the isle of Elephanta, and who had reached the highest degree of sanctity. I found him propped against the wall of the cavern. Robed in sackcloth, his knees drawn up to his chin, his fingers clasped around his legs, he crouched there motionless. His upturned pupils left visible only the whites of his eyes; his drawn lips ex-

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posed his teeth; his skin clung to his cheekbones; his hair, thrown back, hung in stiff locks like overhanging plants; his beard, divided in two floods, nearly touched the ground; and his nails curved inward like an eagle's claw.

“His skin, naturally brown, had been dried and darkened by the sun till it resembled basalt, and, thus seated, he looked, both in form and color, like a Canopic vase. At first I thought him dead. His arms, that were ankylosed in a cataleptic immobility, I shook in vain; in his ear I shouted the most powerful of the sacramental words which were to reveal me to him as initiate, but he heeded them not, nor did his eyelids quiver. In my despair of arousing him I was about to leave him, when suddenly I heard a singular rustle; swift as a lightning flash, a bluish spark passed before my eyes, hovered for a second on the half-open lips of the penitent, and disappeared.

“Brahma-Logum (such was the name of this holy personage) seemed to awake from a lethargy; he opened his eyes, gazed at me in a natural manner, and answered my



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questions. 'Your wish is fulfilled,' he said; 'you have seen a soul. I have succeeded in freeing mine from my body whenever it so pleases me; it goes and returns like a luminous bee, perceptible only to the eyes of the adept. I have fasted, I have prayed, I have meditated so long, I have dominated the flesh so rigorously, that I have been able to loose the terrestrial bonds. Vishnu, the god of the tenfold incarnations, has revealed to me the mysterious syllable that guides the soul in its avatars. If, after making the consecrated gestures, I were to pronounce that word, your soul would fly away and animate whatever man or beast I might designate. I bequeath you this secret, which of the whole world I am now the sole possessor. I am glad you have come, for I long to disappear in the bosom of the Increate as does the drop of water that falls in the sea.' And therewith the penitent whispered in a voice as feeble as the last gasp of the moribund, but very distinctly, a few syllables which made a shudder, such as that which Job has mentioned, run down my back."

"Doctor," cried Octave, "what do you

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mean? I dare not fathom the awful profundities of your thought.”

“I mean,” M. Balthazar Cherbonneau tranquilly replied, “that I have not forgotten my friend Brahma-Logum’s magic formula, and that the Countess Prascovie will be clever indeed if she recognizes the soul of Octave de Saville in the body of Olaf Labinski.”

## V

DR. BALTHAZAR CHERBONNEAU'S reputation as physician and wonder-worker had begun to be noised through Paris. His eccentricities, affected or natural, had made him the fashion. But far from seeking to form what is called a practice, he rebuffed his patients by shutting the door in their faces, giving strange prescriptions, or ordering impossible regimens. The cases that he accepted were those that were hopeless; a vulgar consumption, a humdrum enterite, or a commonplace typhoid he disdainfully dismissed to the care of his brother practitioners. But on supreme occasions the cures he effected were simply inconceivable. Standing at the bedside, he made magic gestures over a glass of water, and bodies already stiff and cold, prepared even for the coffin, after imbibing a few drops of the liquid recovered the flexibility

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of life, the colors of health, and sitting up again gazed about them with eyes that had become accustomed to the shadows of the tomb. In consequence, he was known as the resurrectionist, the physician of the dead. But it was not always that he consented to use his powers, and he often refused enormous sums from wealthy invalids. To decide him to undertake a struggle with destruction, he must needs be touched by the grief of some mother imploring the restoration of her only child; by the despair of some lover whose beloved was at the door of death; or else it was necessary for him to consider the patient as one whose life was valuable to poetry, science, or the progress of humanity. In this way he saved a delicious baby that was being throttled by croup's iron fingers, a charming maiden in the last stages of consumption, a poet in delirium tremens, an inventor attacked by cerebral congestion, and whose discovery would otherwise have been buried with him.

Elsewhere he declined to intervene, alleging that nature should not be interfered with, that certain deaths were necessary, and that in preventing them there was a

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risk of disturbing something in the order that is universal. You can see, therefore, that M. Balthazar Cherbonneau was the most paradoxical of physicians, and that he had brought with him from India a complete outfit of vagaries. His fame as a magnetizer was, however, even greater than his fame as a physician. In the presence of a select company he had given a séance or two, of which the marvels that were related disturbed every preconceived idea of the possible and the impossible and surpassed the prodigies of Cagliostro.

Dr. Cherbonneau lived on the ground floor of an old mansion in the Rue du Regard. The apartment which he occupied was strung out in the manner peculiar to former times. The high windows opened on a garden that was planted with great black-trunked trees topped with vibrant green. Although it was summer, powerful furnaces puffed from their brazen-grated mouths blasts of hot air that maintained throughout the vast chambers a temperature that exceeded a hundred degrees Fahrenheit, for the physician, accustomed to the incendiary climate of India, shivered

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beneath our pale sun very much as did that traveler who, returning from the equatorial sources of the Blue Nile, shook with cold in Cairo; as a consequence, Dr. Cherbonneau never left his house save in a closed carriage, and on such occasions he wrapped himself in a coat of Siberian fox, and rested his feet on a foot-warmer filled with boiling water.

His rooms were furnished with low couches covered with stuffs from Malabar, inwrought with chimerical elephants and fabulous birds; there were detachable stands, colored and gilded by the Ceylonese with naif barbarity; there were Japanese vases filled with exotic flowers; and on the floor from one end of the apartment to the other was spread one of those funereal carpets sprigged in black and white that the Thugs weave for punishment in prison, and of which the woof seems woven of the hemp from the ropes with which they strangle their victims. And therewith, in the corners, were a few Hindu idols of marble and bronze, the eyes long and almond-shaped, the nose hooped with rings, the lips thick and smiling, necklaced with

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pearls that descended to the waist, singular and mysterious in their attributes, the legs crossed on supporting pedestals. On the walls hung water-color miniatures by some Calcutta or Lucknow artist representing the Avatars which Vishnu has accomplished: his incarnation in a fish, in a tortoise, in a pig, in a lion with the head of man, in a Brahman dwarf, in Rama, in a hero combating the thousand-armed giant Cartasuciriargunen; in Krishna, the miraculous child in whom the dreamers see a Hindu Christ; in Buddha, adorer of the great god Mahadeva; and lastly, representing him asleep in the Milky Way on the five-headed serpent coiled in the form of a supporting dais, and there awaiting the hour when for final incarnation he shall assume the form of that winged white horse which in dropping its hoof upon the universe shall cause the world to cease to be.

In the last room, heated to an even greater degree than the others, M. Balthazar Cherbonneau was seated surrounded by Sanskrit volumes. In these volumes the letters had been made with a stylus on

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thin tablets of wood, which latter were pierced and strung together on a cord in a way which more closely resembled Venetian blinds than books, at least as European libraries understand them.

In the centre of the room an electric machine, its bottles filled with gold leaf and its glass plates revolved by cranks, raised its complicated and disquieting silhouette beside a mesmeric bucket spiked with numberless iron rods, and in which was plunged a metal lance. M. Cherbonneau was anything but a charlatan, and did not need a stage setting; but, nevertheless, it was difficult to enter this weird retreat without experiencing a little of the impression which, in olden times, the alchemic laboratories must have caused.

Count Olaf Labinski had heard of the miracles realized by the physician, and his half-credulous curiosity had been aroused. The Slav races have a natural leaning towards the marvelous, which the most careful education does not always correct, and, besides, witnesses worthy of belief who had assisted at these *séances* told things of them which could not be credited until



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seen, no matter how much confidence one had in the narrator. The count went, therefore, to call on the thaumaturgist.

When he entered Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau's apartment he felt as if surrounded by imperceptible flames; the blood rushed to his head and seethed in the veins of his temples. He was suffocated by the excessive heat, and the lamps burning with aromatic oils, the huge Java flowers swaying their chalices like censers, intoxicated him with their vertiginous emanations and their asphyxiating perfumes. He staggered a few steps towards M. Cherbonneau, who was squatting on his divan in one of those strange fakir-like postures with which Prince Soltikoff has so picturesquely illustrated his book of Indian travels. One might have said, on seeing the angles formed by his joints beneath the folds of his garments, he was a human spider wrapped in his web, and crouching immovable before his prey. At sight of the count his turquoise pupils lighted up in their orbits, as yellow as the bistre of the liverwort, with a phosphorescent gleam, which as

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quickly died away, as if covered by a voluntary film.

Understanding Olaf's discomfort, the physician extended his hand towards him, and with two or three passes surrounded him with an atmosphere of spring, creating for him a cool paradise out of infernal heat.

"Do you feel better now?" he asked. "Your lungs, accustomed to the Baltic breezes, still icy from their contact with the perpetual snows of the pole, must pant like the bellows of a forge in this scorching air where, nevertheless, I shiver, I, baked, tempered, and, so to speak, calcinated in the furnaces of the sun."

Count Labinski made a sign to show that he no longer suffered from the high temperature of the apartment.

The physician continued in a good-humored tone,—

"Well, you have heard my tricks of legerdemain spoken of, and you want a sample of my skill. Oh, I am cleverer than Comus, Comte, or Bosco."

"My curiosity is not so frivolous," replied the count, "and I have too

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much respect for one of the princes of science.”

“I am not an erudite in the acceptation given to the word; but, on the other hand, in studying certain subjects disdained by science I have mastered some unemployed occult forces, and I produce effects which appear miraculous, though they are perfectly natural. By watching for it, I have sometimes surprised the soul; it has made me confidences by which I have profited, and repeated words which I have retained. The spirit is everything; matter exists only in appearance. The universe is, perhaps, but a dream of God, or an irradiation of the Logos in space. I rumple at will the garment of the body; I stop or quicken life, I remove the senses, I do away with distance; I rout pain without chloroform, ether, or other anæsthetic drug. Armed with the force of my will, that electricity of the intellect, I vivify or I annihilate. Nothing is opaque to my eyes; my gaze pierces everything; I discern the radiations of thought; and I can make them pass through my invisible prism and reflect themselves on the white curtain of my

## *Avatar*

brain as the solar spectrums are projected on a screen. But all that is trifling beside the prodigies accomplished by certain yogis of India who have arrived at the sublimest height of asceticism. We Europeans are too superficial, too inattentive, too matter of fact, too much in love with our clay-prison, to open windows on the eternal and the infinite. Nevertheless, as you shall judge, I have obtained a few rather strange results."

Whereupon Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau slid back on a rod the rings of a heavy portière which concealed a sort of alcove situate at the end of the room. By the light of an alcohol flame, which flickered on a bronze tripod, Count Olaf Labinski saw a spectacle, at which, notwithstanding his courage, he shuddered. On a black marble table was a young man, naked to the waist, and immobile as a corpse. Not a drop of blood flowed from his body, which bristled with arrows like that of St. Sebastian. He might have been taken for the colored print of a martyr in which the vermilion tinting of the wounds had been forgotten.

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“This eccentric physician,” Olaf said to himself, “is perhaps a worshiper of Siva, and has sacrificed a victim to his god.”

“Oh, he does not suffer at all; prick him without fear; not a muscle of his face will move,” said the physician, drawing the arrows from the body as one takes pins from a cushion.

A few rapid motions of the hands released the patient from the web of emanations which imprisoned him, and he awoke, with an ecstatic smile on his lips, as if from a happy dream. M. Cherbonneau dismissed him with a gesture, and he withdrew by a small door cut in the woodwork with which the alcove was lined.

“I could have cut off a leg or an arm without his perceiving it,” said the physician, moving his wrinkles by way of a smile; “I did not do it because as yet I cannot create, and man, in that respect inferior to the lizard, has not a sap sufficiently powerful to remake the members cut from him. But if I do not create, I at least rejuvenate.” He raised a veil which covered an aged woman who, lost in a magnetic slumber, was seated in an arm-

## *Avatar*

chair near the marble table. Her features, which might once have been beautiful, were withered, and the ravages of time could be read in the emaciated outlines of her arms, shoulders, and bust. The physician fixed his blue eyes on her with obstinate intensity for several minutes. Gradually the tremulous lines strengthened, the contour of the bust recovered its virginal purity, smooth white flesh filled the hollows of the throat, the cheeks rounded into the peach-like bloom and freshness of youth, the eyes opened sparkling in liquid vivacity, and the mask of age, lifted as by magic, disclosed a lovely young woman.

“Do you think the Fountain of Youth has somewhere poured forth its miraculous waters?” asked the physician of the count, who stood stupefied by this transformation. “I, at least, believe so, for man invents nothing, and each one of his dreams is a divination or a memory. But let us leave this figure, remodeled for an instant by my will, and consult the young girl tranquilly sleeping in this corner. Question her; she knows more than sages and sibyls. You can send her to one of your seven castles

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in Bohemia, and ask her what your most secret casket incloses; she will tell you, for it needs but a second for her soul to make the journey, which is not so surprising, after all, since electricity travels seventy thousand leagues in that space of time, and electricity is to thought what the cab is to the train. Give her your hand to put yourself in communication with her; you will not have to formulate your question, she will read it in your mind."

The young girl replied to the mental interrogation of the count in a voice as lifeless as that of a spectre.

"In the cedar casket there is a bit of clay on which can be seen the impress of a small foot."

"Has she guessed correctly?" asked the physician negligently, as though quite sure of the infallibility of his somnambulist.

The count's checks grew crimson. In the earliest days of his love he had taken the imprint of one of Prascovic's footsteps from an alley in a park, and he kept it, like a relic, in a box of the most costly workmanship inlaid with silver and en-

## *Avatar*

amel, whose microscopic key he wore hung at his neck on a Venetian chain.

M. Balthazar Cherbonneau, who was a well-bred man, seeing the count's embarrassment, did not insist, but led him to a table, on which was set some water that was crystal in its clarity.

“You have, of course, heard of the magic mirror in which Mephistopheles showed Faust the image of Helen; now, without having a hoof in my silk stocking or plumes in my hat, I am none the less able to entertain you with this innocent phenomenon. Lean over this bowl and think intently of the person you wish to see; living or dead, far or near, she will come at your call from the end of the world or the depths of history.”

The count bent over the bowl. Soon the water grew troubled and took on opalescent tints, as if a drop of essence had been poured into it, and a rainbow-hued ring encircled the edge of the dish framing the picture which already sketched itself beneath the creamy cloud.

The mist faded. • Through the now transparent water a young woman was revealed.



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Her loose gown was of lace, her eyes sea green, her hair wavy and golden. Over the ivory keys of a piano her lovely hands strayed like white butterflies. The picture was so marvelous in its perfection that at sight of it artists might have died of despair. It was Prascovie Labinska, who, unconsciously, obeyed the passionate invocation of the count.

“And now let us pass to something more curious,” said the physician, grasping the count’s hand and placing it on one of the rods belonging to the mesmeric bucket. Olaf had no sooner touched the metal charged with an overpowering magnetism than he fell stunned to the floor.

Taking him in his arms, the physician lifted him up, laid him on the divan, rang, and said to the servant who appeared at the door,—

“Go find M. Octave de Saville.”

## VI

IN a little while the wheels of a carriage resounded in the silent courtyard of the hotel, and almost simultaneously Octave was announced. When M. Cherbonneau showed him the Count Olaf Labinski stretched on a sofa, apparently lifeless, he was stupefied. At first he thought murder had been committed, and was struck dumb with horror; but, on a closer examination, he noticed that the chest of the sleeper rose and fell with an almost imperceptible respiration.

“There,” said the physician, “there is your disguise already prepared. It is a little more difficult to put on than a domino; but Romeo, in climbing to the balcony at Verona, did not worry at the danger he ran of breaking his neck. He knew that Juliet awaited him in the silence of the night. The Countess Prascovie Labin-

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ska is well worth the daughter of the Capulets.”

Perplexed by the weirdness of the situation, Octave did not answer. His eyes were fixed on the count, whose head slightly thrown back on a cushion gave him the appearance of one of those effigies of knights which, with their stiff necks resting on a carved marble pillow, lie above their tombs in Gothic cloisters. In spite of himself, this chivalrous figure, of which he was to take possession, smote him with remorse.

The physician mistook Octave's perplexity for hesitation. A vaguely disdainful smile flitted across his lips, and he said,—

“If you are not decided I can awaken the count, who will depart as he came, astonished at my magnetic power. But, think it over; such a chance may never repeat itself. Still, however great my interest in your love may be, however much I desire to make an experiment which has never been attempted in Europe, I dare not hide from you that this exchange of souls is perilous. Question your heart.

## *Avatar*

Will you risk your life in this supreme attempt? The Bible says Love is as strong as death."

"I am ready," Octave replied simply.

"Very good," cried the doctor, rubbing his shrunken, brown hands together with an extraordinary rapidity, as if he wished to strike fire in the manner of savages. "A passion which recoils at nothing pleases me. There are but two things in this world—passion and will. If you are not happy it will not be my fault. Ah, Brahma-Logum, from the depths of the sky of Indra, where the Apsaras surround you with their voluptuous choirs, you shall see if I have forgotten the irresistible formula which you gasped in my ear on abandoning your petrified carcass. Word and gestures, I have retained them all. To work! to work! We shall make in our caldron as strange a mess as the witches of Macbeth, without, however, the sorcery of the North. Take this arm-chair in front of me, and give yourself confidently into my power. Good! eye to eye, hand to hand. Already the charm works. The sense of time and space is lost, consciousness fades, the eye-

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lids fall. The muscles, no longer commanded by the brain, relax; the mind is lulled, and all the delicate threads which hold the soul to the body are untied. Brahma in the golden egg, where he dreamed for ten thousand years, was not farther from external things. Now inundate him with electric currents, bathe him in psychic emanations."

While muttering these disjointed sentences, the physician did not for an instant discontinue his passes. Luminous rays flew from his distended hands and struck his patient on the brow and heart, while around him there gathered slowly a sort of visible atmosphere, phosphorescent like an aureole.

"That is perfect!" exclaimed M. Balthazar Cherbonneau, applauding himself for his success. "Now he is as I want him. But there," he cried, after a pause, as if he read through Octave's skull the last effort of his vanishing personality, "what is it that still resists? What is that mutinous idea which, driven from the circulations of the brain, tries to escape my influence by crouching on the primal mo-

## *Avatar*

nad, in the sphericity of life? But I know how to reach and curb it."

To master this unconscious opposition the physician recharged the magnetic battery of his gaze, and caught the rebel thought between the base of the brain and the insertion of the spinal marrow, the most secret sanctuary, the most mysterious tabernacle of the soul. His triumph was complete.

He next prepared himself with a majestic solemnity for the surprising experiment he was to attempt. Robing himself in a linen gown like a Magi, he washed his hands in perfumed water. He took from different boxes powders, and smeared his brow and cheeks with hierarchic designs. He encircled his arm with the Brahman cord, and read two or three Slokas of the sacred poems, omitting none of the minute rites recommended by the Mahatmas of the isles of Elephanta.

These ceremonies terminated, he threw the doors of the furnaces wide open, and soon the room was filled with an incandescent atmosphere, which would have made tigers swoon in the jungle, cracked the

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cuirass of mud on the hides of buffaloes, and exploded aloes into bloom.

“The two sparks of divine fire which will now find themselves nude and divested for several seconds of their mortal envelope must not pale or waver in our icy air,” said the physician, examining the thermometer, which marked 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

Between the inert bodies Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau, garmented in white, looked like a priest of one of those sanguinary religions which throw the corpses of men on the altars of their gods. Indeed, he recalled that pontiff of Vitziliputzili, of whom Heine speaks in a ballad, though his intentions were necessarily more pacific.

Presently he approached the motionless count and pronounced the ineffable syllable, which he hastened to repeat to Octave, who lay in a profound slumber. M. Balthazar Cherbonneau's face, which under ordinary circumstances was simply fantastic, now assumed a singular majesty. The extent of the power which he wielded ennobled his irregular features, and if any one had witnessed the sacerdotal gravity with which he accomplished these myste-

## *Avatar*

rious rites he would not have recognized in him the Hoffmannesque physician who suggested, while defying the pencil of the caricaturist.

Strange things then came to pass: Octave de Saville and Count Olaf Labinski appeared to be simultaneously agitated by a convulsion of agony; their faces, which were of a deathly pallor, twitched nervously, and a slight froth rose to their lips. Two small blue flames scintillated hesitantly over their heads.

The physician made an imperious gesture, which seemed to trace the way for them through the air, and the two phosphorescent sparks began to move. They crossed to their new abodes, leaving a trail of light behind them. Octave's soul entered the body of Count Labinski, and the count's soul entered that of Octave. The avatar was accomplished.

A flush of red at the cheek-bones showed that life had reentered the human clay, which, an instant soulless, would, without the physician's power, have become the prey of the angel of death.

Cherbonneau's blue eyes gleamed with



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joy at his triumph, and he said to himself, as he strode up and down the room, "I should like to see the most noted physicians do as much,—they who are so proud of mending the human machine when it gets out of order: Hippocrates, Galen, Paracelsus, Van Helmont, Boerhaave, Tronchin, Hahnemann, Rasori, the most insignificant Indian fakir squatting on the steps of a pagoda knows a thousand times more than you! What matters the body when one can command the spirit?"

At the end of his sentence Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau cut several capers of exultation, and danced like the hills in the Sir-Hasirin of Solomon; but, catching his foot in the hem of his Brahman gown, he almost fell on his nose, a trifling accident, which recalled him to his senses and calmed his excitement.

"Now to awake my sleeping friends," said he, after he had removed the smears of the colored powder with which he had streaked his face, and tossed aside his Brahman costume. Placing himself before the body of Count Labinski, which contained Octave's soul, he made the passes

## *Avalar*

necessary to awaken him from his somnambulistic state, shaking from his fingers at each gesture the electric fluid withdrawn.

After a few minutes Octave-Labinski (hereafter we will so call him for the clearness of the story) rose on his elbow, rubbed his hands across his eyes, and cast around him a look of astonishment, not yet lighted by the consciousness of self. When a finer perception of objects returned to him the first thing he noticed was his own form placed quite away from him on a sofa. He saw himself, not reflected by a mirror, but in reality. He gave a cry,—to his horror, this cry did not resound in his own tone of voice; the exchange of souls having occurred during the magnetic sleep, he had no recollection of it, and felt a strange sense of discomfort. His mind, served by new organs, was like a workman whose habitual tools had been taken away and replaced by others. Psyche, exiled, beat with restless wings the vault of this unfamiliar skull, and lost herself in the mazes of a brain in which still lingered traces of unfamiliar thoughts.

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When the physician had sufficiently enjoyed Octave's surprise he said, "Well, how do you like your new habitation? Is your soul at home in the body of this handsome cavalier, hetman, hospodar, magnate, and husband of the most beautiful woman in the world? You no longer mean to let yourself die, as was your intention the first time I saw you in your gloomy apartment of the Rue Saint-Lazare now that the doors of the Labinski mansion are open to you, and you need not fear that Prascovie will close your mouth with her hand, as in the Villa Salviati, when you wish to speak of love. You see now that old Balthazar Cherbonneau, in spite of his hideous face,—which, by the way, he can change when he wants to,—has still rather good recipes in his box of tricks."

"Doctor," replied Octave-Labinski, "you have the power of a god, or at least of a demon."

"Oh, oh, do not fear; there is not the slightest devilry in this! Your salvation is not in danger. I shall not make you sign a compact with a flourish. Nothing could be simpler than what has happened.

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The Logos which has created light can surely displace a soul. If men would but hearken to God across time and infinity they would see things even more surprising than that."

"With what gratitude, with what devotion, can I acknowledge this inestimable service?"

"You owe me nothing. You interest me; and to an old Lascar like myself, bronzed by every sun, hardened to every event, an emotion is a rare occurrence. You have revealed love to me, and you know we dreamers, who are more or less alchemists, magicians, and philosophers, all seek the absolute. But get up, move about, and see if your new skin is uncomfortable."

Octave-Labinski obeyed, and took a turn or two about the room. Already he was less awkward; though occupied by another soul, the body of the count retained the impulsion of its ordinary habits, and the new guest confided himself to these physical memories, for it was important for him to have the walk, the air, and the gestures of the former proprietor.

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“Had I not myself but just operated the exchange of your souls,” Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau said, laughing, “I should think that nothing unusual had happened during the evening, and I should take you for the true, legitimate, and authentic Lithuanian Count Olaf Labinski, whose real self still sleeps there in the chrysalis which you have disdainfully discarded. But it will soon be midnight; and if you do not want Prascovie to scold you, or accuse you of preferring lausquet or baccarat to her, you had now better go. You must not begin your married life with a quarrel; it would be a bad omen. In the meantime, I will busy myself in awakening your former envelope with all the care and respect it deserves.”

Recognizing the importance of the physician's suggestion, Octave-Labinski hastened to leave. At the foot of the steps the count's magnificent bay horses snorted with impatience, and in champing their bits had flecked the pavement about them with froth. On Octave's appearance a superb green-garbed groom, of the lost race

## *Avatar*

of heyduques, hurried to the carriage-step, which he lowered with a bang. Octave, who had first turned mechanically towards his modest brougham, installed himself in the splendid vehicle, and said to the chasseur, who flung the order to the coachman, "Home!" The door was hardly closed when the horses started, and the descendant of Almanzors and Azolans, aided by the large cords, swung himself up behind with a lightness one would not have expected of his immense size.

The distance between the Rue du Regard and the Faubourg Saint-Honoré is not long; it was covered in a few minutes; and presently the huge portals of the mansion opened and gave way for the carriage, which swept about a large graveled courtyard, and stopped with remarkable precision under a pink-and-white striped awning.

The courtyard was vast. Octave-Labinski took in the details with that rapidity of vision which the mind acquires on certain important occasions. Surrounded with symmetrical buildings, and lighted by bronze lamp-posts of which the gas darted

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white tongues of flame into crystal lanterns resembling those that in olden times ornamented the Bucentaur, the Labinski mansion looked more like a palace than a mere house. Boxes of orange trees, worthy of the terrace at Versailles, stood at equal distances along the edge of the asphalt, which framed, like a border, the carpet of turf forming the centre.

The transformed lover, on setting his foot on the threshold, was obliged to pause an instant and press his hand to his heart to still its beating. He had, indeed, the body of Count Olaf Labinski, but he possessed only its physical attributes; all the ideas belonging to the brain had flown with the soul of its first proprietor,—this house, which was henceforth to be his, was strange to him; he was even ignorant of its interior arrangements. A staircase rose before him; he followed where it led, determined to attribute to abstraction any mistake he might make. The polished stone steps shone brilliantly, and threw into relief the opulent crimson of the broad strip of velvet carpet, which, held in place by rods of gilded brass, traced the way softly under-

## *Avatar*

foot. Stands, filled with beautiful exotic plants, lined the stair. An immense windowed lantern, suspended by a heavy rope of knotted and tasseled purple silk, flashed golden shimmers over the stucco walls, smooth and white as marble, and threw a flood of light on a reproduction on one of Canova's most celebrated groups, Cupid embracing Psyche.

The landing of the first and only story was paved with mosaics of costly design, and on the walls, hung by silken cords, were four pictures, the work of Paris Bordone, Bonifazio, Palma the elder, and Paul Veronese, whose architectural and pompous style harmonized with the magnificence of the staircase.

A high baize door, studded with gold nails, opened on the landing. Octave-Labinski pushed it, and found himself in a large antechamber, where drowsed several liveried footmen, who at his approach rose as if on springs, and ranged themselves along the walls with the impassibility of Oriental slaves. He passed on. A white-and-gold drawing-room succeeded the antechamber, but there was no



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one in it. Octave rang a bell. A maid appeared.

“Can madame receive me?”

“Her ladyship is undressing, but she will be visible presently.”

## VII

LEFT alone with the body of Octave de Saville, which the soul of Count Olaf Labinski inhabited, Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau set himself to work to bring it back to every-day life. After a few passes Olaf-de Saville (we must now unite these two names to designate a double personage) came out of the profound slumber, or rather catalepsy, which had chained him, like a spectre from Hades, stiff and motionless, to the sofa. He rose with an automatic movement, undirected as yet by the will, and staggered from dizziness. Objects swayed about him; the incarnations of Vishnu on the walls danced a saraband. Dr. Cherbonneau, waving his arms like wings, and rolling his blue eyes in wrinkled, brown orbits which looked like the rims of spectacles, appeared to him as the Mahatma of Elephanta. The weird sights

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at which he had assisted before falling into the mesmeric trance reacted on his reason, and he grasped reality slowly. He resembled a sleeper suddenly awakened from a nightmare, who mistakes the clothes scattered over the furniture for vague, human shapes, and thinks the brass curtain knobs, shining with the reflection of the night-light, are the flaming eyes of cyclops.

Little by little this phantasmagoria evaporated, and things resumed their natural aspect; M. Balthazar Cherbonneau was no longer an Indian fakir, but a plain doctor of medicine, who smiled at his patient with commonplace good nature.

“Are you satisfied, sir,” he said, in a tone of obsequious humility, in which could be discerned a shade of irony; “are you satisfied with the experiments which I have had the honor to make before you? I dare to hope that you will not much regret your evening, and that you will leave here convinced that all that is told of magnetism is not, as official science affirms, mere fable and jugglery.”

Olaf-de Saville nodded assent, and left the apartment accompanied by Dr. Cher-

## *Avatar*

bonneau, who made him a low bow at each door.

The brougham drove up, grazing the steps, and the soul of the Countess Labinska's husband, which inhabited Octave de Saville's body, entered it without noticing that neither the livery nor the carriage was his.

The coachman asked where his master wished to go.

"Home," answered Olaf-de Saville, confusedly, astonished at not hearing the voice of the chasseur who usually asked him this question with a most pronounced Hungarian accent. The brougham in which he found himself was upholstered with dark-blue damask; his own coupé was lined with buttereup colored satin, and the count, though surprised, accepted it all much as one does in a dream where ordinary objects present themselves under strange aspects without however ceasing to be recognizable. He felt smaller than usual; also, it seemed to him he had gone to the physician's in evening dress; yet, without remembrance of having changed his clothes, he saw that he wore a summer suit of thin material,

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which had never formed part of his wardrobe. His mind was confused, and his thoughts, so lucid in the morning, unraveled themselves laboriously. Attributing this singular state to the weird scenes of the evening, he thought no more of it; and leaning his head against the side of the carriage, he drifted into an undefined reverie, a vague dreaminess, which was neither waking nor sleeping.

The sudden halt of the horse, and the coachman's voice shouting "Gate!" recalled him to himself; he lowered the window, put out his head, and saw by the light of a lamp an unfamiliar street, and a house which was not his own.

"Where the devil have you brought me, fool?" he cried; "are we in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré,—Hotel Labinski?"

"Excuse me, sir; I did not understand," muttered the coachman, turning his horse in the direction indicated.

During the transit the transformed count asked himself several questions which he was unable to answer. Why had his own carriage left without him, since he had ordered it to wait? Why did he find him-

## *Avatar*

self in some one else's. For the moment he fancied that the clearness of his perceptions must be obscured by fever, or perhaps that the thaumaturgistic doctor, to impress his credulity more keenly, had made him inhale in his sleep hashish or some other hallucinating drug, whose illusions would be dispelled by a night's rest.

The carriage reached the Labinski mansion. The Suisse, when summoned, refused to open the door, saying it was not a reception evening, and adding that his master had returned an hour ago, and her ladyship had retired.

"Fool, are you drunk or crazy?" cried Olaf-de Saville, pushing aside the giant who rose colossal from the threshold of the half-open door, like one of those bronze statues which, in Arab tales, defend from wandering knights the entrance to enchanted castles.

"Drunk or crazy yourself, my little gentleman," answered the man, who from his natural crimson turned purple with anger.

"Scoundrel!" roared Olaf-de Saville, "did I not respect myself"—

"Be quiet, or I will break you across my

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knee and throw the pieces on the sidewalk," replied the giant, opening a hand larger than the huge plaster hand in the glove shop of the Rue Richelieu; "you must not be ugly with me, my little man, because you have drunk too much champagne."

Olaf-de Saville, exasperated, shoved the Suisse so fiercely that he got by under the porch. Several footmen who were still up ran forward at the noise of the altercation.

"I discharge you, stupid animal, wretch, villain! You shall not even spend the night in the house. Go, or I will kill you as I would a mad dog. Do not force me to spill the base blood of a lackey."

And the count, dispossessed of his body, with blood-shot eyes, foaming lips, and clinched hands, rushed at the enormous Suisse, who grasped his aggressor's hands in one of his own, and held them almost crushed in the vise of his short, thick fingers, fleshy and knotted like those of a mediæval torturer.

"There now," said the giant, who, good-natured enough in the main, and fearing nothing more from his adversary, simply gave him a shake or two to keep him re-

## *Avatar*

spectful. "There now, is there any sense in getting into such a state when one is dressed like a man of the world, and then come like a rowdy making a racket at night in respectable houses? One owes a certain consideration to wine, and that which has made you so drunk must be famous, that is why I do not knock you down, and I shall just put you gently out on the sidewalk, where the watchman will pick you up if you continue your uproar. A breath of prison air will sharpen your wits."

"Rascals," cried Olaf-de Saville to the assembled lackeys, "you allow this low varlet to insult your master, the noble Count Labinski!"

At this name the footmen with one accord gave a loud shout; a burst of laughter, Homeric and convulsive, lifted their galloon-covered chests.

"This little gentleman who thinks himself the Count Labinski! ha, ha, ha! the idea is good!"

An icy sweat broke out on Olaf-de Saville's temples. A sharp thought pierced his brain like a dagger, and he felt the



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marrow freeze in his bones. Was Smarra's knee on his chest, or was this real life? Had his reason foundered in the bottomless sea of magnetism, or was he the plaything of some diabolical machination? Not one of his servants, so trembling, so submissive, so prostrate before him, recognized their master. Had his body been changed as well as his clothing and carriage?

"That you may be very sure of not being the Count Labinski," said one of the most insolent of the group, "look, there he is, aroused by your clamor, descending the steps himself."

The Suisse's captive turned his eyes towards the end of the court, and saw, erect under the awning of the marquise, a slender, graceful young man, with oval face, black eyes, aquiline nose, and slight mustache, a young man who was none other than himself, or else his own ghost modeled by the devil with delusive cunning.

The Suisse dropped the hands which he held imprisoned. The lackeys ranged themselves respectfully against the wall, and with lowered eyes, hanging hands, in

## *Avatar*

an absolute immobility, like pages at the approach of the Sultan, they rendered to this phantom the honors which the real count was denied.

Prascovie's husband, though brave as a Slav, a term which implies everything, felt an unspeakable terror at the approach of this Ménechme, who in mingling with real life and making his double unrecognizable was far more terrible than on the stage. An ancient family legend came to his mind and increased his dread. Each time a Labinski was to die, he was warned by the appearance of a phantom exactly similar to himself. Among northern nations to see one's double, even in a dream, is always regarded as a fatal omen, and the intrepid warrior of the Caucasus, at the aspect of this external vision of his own self, was seized with an insurmountable superstitious horror. He who would have plunged his arm in the mouth of a loaded cannon recoiled at sight of himself.

Octave-Labinski advanced towards his former body, in which the count's indignant soul was struggling and shivering, and

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said, in a tone of cold and haughty politeness,—

“Sir, do not compromise yourself with these servants. The Count Labinski, if you wish to speak to him, is visible from noon until two o’clock. The countess receives on Thursdays those who have had the honor to be presented to her.”

Having uttered these sentences slowly, and emphasized each syllable, the pseudocount quietly withdrew, and the doors closed behind him.

Olaf-de Saville was put in his carriage unconscious. When he came to his senses he was lying on a bed unlike his own in shape, in a room which he did not remember ever to have entered. At his side stood a strange servant, who raised his head and made him smell a bottle of salts. “Do you feel better, sir?” Jean asked the count, whom he took for his master.

“Yes,” answered Olaf-de Saville; “it was nothing but a momentary faintness.”

“Shall I leave you, sir, or had I better sit up?”

“No, leave me; but, before going, light the candelabra by the mirror.”

## *Avalar*

“You are not afraid, sir, that the light will prevent your sleeping?”

“Not at all; besides, I am not yet sleepy.”

“I shall not go to bed, sir,” said Jean, inwardly alarmed at the count’s pallor and drawn features, “and if you need anything I will come at the first sound of the bell.”

When Jean, after lighting the candles, had gone, the count hurried to the mirror, and in the clear glass where the scintillations of the lights flickered he saw the face of a young man that was sad and gentle, he saw abundant black hair, eyes of a sombre azure, and pale cheeks covered with a dark, silky beard. In fact, a visage which was not his own, and which gazed at him from the depths of the mirror with an air of surprise. At first he tried to believe that some practical joker, was framing his face in the brass and inlaid mother-of-pearl border of the Venetian mirror. He felt behind it; there was no one.

His hands, which he then examined, were longer, thinner, and more veined than his own. On the fourth finger projected a heavy gold ring with a seal, on which was

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engraved a coat-of-arms,—a shield divided, gules and silver, surmounted by a baron's crown. This ring had never belonged to the count, who wore one that bore an eagle displayed in sable, and for crest a pearled coronet. He searched his pockets and drew out a small card-case containing visiting cards with the name: "Octave de Saville."

The laughter of the lackeys at the Hotel Labinski, the apparition of his double, the unknown physiognomy substituted for his own reflection in the mirror, all this might possibly be the illusions of a disordered brain; but these different clothes, the ring which he took from his finger, were material, palpable proofs, evidence not to be denied. A complete metamorphosis had taken place in him without his knowledge. A magician, without doubt, a devil perhaps, had stolen from him his form, his nobility, his name, his whole personality, leaving him only his soul without means to manifest it. The fantastic stories of Pierre Schlemil and the Tale of Saint Sylvester's Night came to his mind. But La Motte-Fouqué and Hoffmann's characters had only

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lost the one his shadow, and the other his reflection, and if this strange loss of a projection which every one possesses inspired vexatious suspicions, at least no one denied that they were themselves.

The count's position was far worse. He could not claim his own title with the body in which he was now imprisoned. In the eyes of the world he would pass for an impudent impostor, or at least for a madman. In this deceitful envelope even his wife would disown him. How could he prove to her his identity? Yet surely there were a thousand familiar events, a thousand intimate details unknown to every one else, which, recalled to Prascovic, would make her recognize her husband's soul in this disguise; but of what use would her recognition be even if he obtained it, against the verdict of the world?

He was really and absolutely dispossessed of his self. And he had another anxiety. Was his transformation limited to the exterior change of figure and features, or did he really inhabit the body of another? In this case, what had been done

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with his own? Had a lime pit consumed it, or had it become the property of some bold marauder? The double seen at the Hotel Labinski could be a spectre, a vision perhaps, but it might also be a physical being, installed in the skin which that fakir-faced physician had stolen from him with infernal skill.

A frightful idea stung his heart like a viper's fang: "But this fictitious Count Labinski pressed into my shape by the devil's hands, this vampire who is now living in my house, whom my servants obey in spite of me, perhaps at this moment he is setting his cloven hoof on the threshold of that room where I have never entered less agitated than on the first night. And does Prascovie smile and, with a divine blush, lean her charming head on that shoulder marked by the devil's claw, taking for me that lying shell, that ghoul, that hideous son of night and hell? Shall I rush to the house, and setting it on fire, shout amid the flames to Prascovie: 'You are deceived; it is not your beloved Olaf whom you press to your heart! You are about to commit an abominable crime

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which my despairing soul will still remember when Time is weary of turning his hour-glass!'"

Waves of flame surged through the count's brain. He gave inarticulate cries of rage, gnawed his knuckles, and paced the room like a wild beast. Insanity was about to submerge the dim consciousness of self which remained to him. He ran to Octave's toilet table, filled a basin with water, and plunged his head into an icy bath.

His presence of mind returned. He told himself that the age of magic and sorcery was past; that death alone separated body and soul; that in the centre of Paris a Polish count accredited with several millions at Rothschilds, related to the best families, the beloved husband of a fashionable woman, and decorated with the Order of Saint-André, could not be juggled with in this way. All this was undoubtedly but a joke, in very bad taste, indeed, but still a joke of M. Balthazar Cherbonneau, a joke which could be explained as naturally as the bugbears of Anne Radcliffe's novels. As he was worn out with fatigue he threw



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himself on Octave's bed, and fell into a deep sleep, so heavy that it resembled death, and which lasted until Jean, thinking his master awake, came in to lay the letters and newspapers on the table.

## VIII

THE count opened his eyes and cast about him an investigating look. He saw a comfortable but simple bedroom. A carpet, spotted in imitation of a leopard skin, covered the floor, and tapestry curtains, which Jean had just drawn back, hung at the windows and hid the doors; on the walls was a green velvet paper simulating cloth. A clock cut from a block of black marble, with a metal dial, surmounted by the statuette of Diana in oxidized silver reduced by Barbedienne, and accompanied by two antique vases also in silver, decorated the mantel, which was of white marble veined with blue. The Venetian mirror in which the count had discovered the previous evening that he did not possess his usual face, and the portrait of an old lady painted by Flandrin, without doubt Octave's mother, were the only ornaments of this rather sad, sedate chamber.

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A divan, an arm-chair near the fireplace, a study table covered with books and papers, furnished the room comfortably, but in no wise recalled the sumptuousness of the Hotel Labinski.

“Will you get up, sir?” said Jean in the careful voice which he had adopted during Octave’s illness, as he handed the count the silk shirt, flannel trousers, and Algerian gandoura, which formed his master’s morning costume. Though the count revolted at putting on a stranger’s clothes, he was obliged to accept those Jean offered him or remain naked; so he put his feet down on the soft black bearskin rug at the side of the bed.

His toilet was soon finished, and Jean, without appearing to have the least doubt as to the identity of the false Octave de Saville whom he helped to dress, asked him, “At what hour will you breakfast, sir?”

“At the usual hour,” replied the count, who had resolved to outwardly accept his incomprehensible transformation so as not to raise obstacles to the steps he intended to take to recover his personality.

Jean left the room, and Olaf-de Saville

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opened the two letters which had come with the newspapers, hoping to get from them some information. The first contained friendly reproaches, and complained that the old habits of comradeship were interrupted without motive; it was signed with a name unknown to him. The second was from Octave's lawyer, and urged him to come and draw a quarter's income long due him, or at least to designate an investment for this money which was lying unproductive.

"So it seems," the count said to himself, "that the Octave de Saville whose body I occupy much against my will really exists. He is not a fanciful being, a character of Achim Arnim or of Clément Brentano: he has an apartment, friends, a lawyer, an income greater than his wants, in fact everything which constitutes the legal status of a gentleman. Nevertheless, it seems to me I am the Count Olaf Labinski."

A glance in the mirror convinced him that this opinion would be shared by no one; the reflection was the same by the clear daylight as by the uncertain flicker of the candles.

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In continuing the domiciliary visit he opened the drawers of the table: in one he found title deeds of property, two one-thousand-franc notes, and fifty louis, which latter he appropriated without scruple for the needs of the campaign which he was about to begin; while in the other drawer he noticed a Russian leather portfolio closed by a patent lock.

Jean entered announcing M. Alfred Humbert, who rushed into the room with the familiarity of an old friend without waiting till the servant returned with his master's answer.

"Good morning, Octave," said the newcomer, a handsome young man with a frank, cordial manner; "what are you up to, what has become of you, are you dead or alive? No one sees you; I write, you do not answer. I should avoid you, but I have no false pride in matters of affection, and I come to see how you are. Good heavens! I cannot let a college friend die of melancholy in the depths of this apartment which is as lugubrious as one of Charles the Fifth's cells in the Yuste Monastery. You imagine you are ill, but you are bored, that

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is all. I shall force you to distract yourself, and I mean to play the despot and take you to a jolly breakfast in which Gustave Raimbaud buries his bachelor freedom."

Uttering this tirade in a half angry, half humorous tone, he took the count's hand in his and shook it vigorously.

"No," answered Prascovic's husband, entering into the spirit of his part, "I am even more indisposed to-day than usual; I am not in good condition; I should sadden and depress you."

"It is true you are pale and you look tired. I will wait for a more favorable occasion. I am off, for I am late for three dozen oysters and a bottle of Sauterne," said Alfred, going towards the door. "Raimbaud will be sorry not to see you."

This visit increased the count's depression. Jean took him for his master, Alfred for his friend. A last trial awaited him. The door opened, and a lady whose hair was streaked with gray, and who in the most striking manner resembled the portrait on the wall, entered the room, took a seat on the sofa, and said to the count,—

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“How are you, my poor Octave? Jean has told me that you came in late yesterday in a state of alarming weakness; do take care of yourself, my dear son, for you know how much I love you notwithstanding the grief caused me by this inexplicable melancholy, the secret of which you have never been willing to confide.”

“Fear nothing, mother, it is not serious,” replied Olaf-de Saville; “I am much better to-day.”

Reassured, Mme. de Saville rose and departed, not wishing to annoy her son, who, she knew, disliked to be long disturbed in his solitude.

“Now I am decidedly Octave de Saville,” cried the count when the old lady had gone; “his mother recognizes me, and does not divine a stranger under her son’s epidermis. Perhaps I am then forever immured in this envelope. What a curious prison for a soul is the body of another! It is hard though to renounce being the Count Olaf Labinski, to lose his coat-of-arms, his wife, his fortune, and to be reduced to a miserable commonplace existence. Oh! to get out of it I would tear this skin of Nes-

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sus which clings to me, and I would return it to its owner in a thousand shreds. Shall I go back to the hotel? No!—I should make a terrible scandal, and the Suisse would throw me out, for I have no strength in this invalid's dressing-gown. I must think, and look about me, for I must know something about the life of this Octave de Saville who is at present myself.”

He tried to open the portfolio. Touched by chance the spring yielded, and the count drew from the leather pockets first a number of sheets of paper blackened with fine, close writing, and then a square of vellum. On this an unskilled but faithful hand had drawn, with love's memory and a resemblance not always attained by great artists, a crayon portrait which it was impossible not to recognize at the first glance. It was the Countess Prascovie Labinska!

At this discovery the count was stupefied. A feeling of furious jealousy succeeded his surprise; how did the countess' portrait come to be in the private portfolio of this strange young man? how did he get it? who had made it? who had given it to him? Had the religiously adored Prascovie de-



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scended from her sky of love to a vulgar intrigue? What infernal jest incarnated him, the husband, in the body of the lover of this woman, till then believed so pure? After being the husband, he was to be the lover! Sarcastic metamorphosis, a reversal of position sufficient to turn one's brain, he might trick himself, be at the same time Clitandre and Georges Dandin! All these ideas buzzed tumultuously in his mind; he felt he was losing his reason, and he made a supreme effort of will to regain a little composure. Without hearing Jean announce that breakfast was ready, he continued with nervous trepidation the examination of the mysterious portfolio.

The leaves composed a sort of psychological journal, abandoned and resumed at different intervals. Here are several fragments devoured by the count with anxious curiosity.

"She will never love me, never, never! I have read in her soft eyes the cruel sentence than which Dante could find nothing more severe to inscribe on the bronze gates of the *Cité Dolente*: 'Lose all hope.' What have I done to God to be damned alive?

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To-morrow, after to-morrow, always, it will be the same. The planets may intercross their orbits, the stars in conjunction may knot, but nothing in my destiny will change. With a word she has dispelled the dream; with a gesture broken the chimaera's wings. The fabulous combinations of the impossible offer me no chance; the numbers thrown a million times in fortune's wheel will never come up,—there is no winning number for me!

“Fool that I am! I know that paradise is closed to me, and I sit stupidly on the threshold, with my back against the door which will not open, and I weep silently, without violence, without effort, as if my eyes were living springs. I have not the courage to rise and plunge into the immense desert or into the tumultuous Babel of men.        ”

“When, sometimes, in the night I cannot sleep, I think of Prascovie; if I sleep I dream of her. Oh, how beautiful she was that day in the garden of the Villa Salvati, at Florence! That white dress with the black ribbons, it was charming and funereal! The white for her, the black for me!

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Now and then the ribbons stirred by the breeze formed a cross on the background of startling white, an invisible spirit was murmuring the death mass of my heart.

“Should some surprising catastrophe tinge my brow with the crown of an emperor or caliph, should the earth bleed for me her veins of gold, should the diamond mines of Golconda and of Visiapour allow me to dig in their sparkling galleries, should Byron’s lyre resound under my fingers, should the most perfect works of antique and modern art lend me their charms, should I discover a new world, well, for all that I would not be further advanced!

“On what a thread hangs fate! If I had had the desire to go to Constantinople I should not have met her; I stay in Florence, I see her, and I die.

“I should have killed myself, but she breathes the air in which I live, and perhaps my covetous lip may seize—oh, ineffable joy!—a distant emanation of that perfumed breath. And, besides, my guilty soul would be assigned to an exile’s planet, and I should lose the chance to make her love me in another life. To be separated

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there, she in paradise, I in hell: oh, maddening thought!

“Why must I love precisely the one woman who cannot love me! Others, called beautiful, who were free, smiled on me with their tenderest smiles, and seemed to invite an avowal which did not come. Oh, how happy is he! What sublimity of former life does God recompense in him by the magnificent gift of her love?”

It was unnecessary to read further. The suspicion which the count had conceived at sight of Prascovie's portrait had vanished at the first lines of this sad confession. He understood that the cherished image, recommenced a thousand times, had been drawn far from the model with the tender and indefatigable patience of an unhappy love, and that it was the madonna of a mystical shrine, before which kneeled a hopeless adoration.

“But perhaps this Octave has made a compact with the devil to divest me of my body, and then in my form to profit by Prascovie's unsuspecting love!”

Though it troubled him strangely, the improbability of such a supposition in these

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modern days made the count soon discard it.

Smiling to himself at his credulity, he ate the now cold breakfast which Jean had brought, then dressed, and ordered the carriage. When it was ready, he had himself driven to Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau's, and crossed the rooms which he had entered the day before as the Count Olaf Labinski, and from which he had come out saluted by all the world with the name of Octave de Saville. The physician was seated, as usual, on the divan in the farthest room, holding his foot in his hand, and seemingly plunged in a profound meditation.

At the sound of the count's steps he raised his head.

"Ah! it is you, my dear Octave. I was about to go to you, but it is a good sign when the invalid comes to the physician."

"Always Octave! I think I shall go mad with rage," thought the count. Then crossing his arms, he stood in front of the physician, and fastening on him a terrible look, said,—

"You know perfectly, M. Balthazar Cherbonneau, that I am not Octave, but

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Count Olaf Labinski, and you know it, because last evening, on this very spot you stole my skin by means of your foreign witchcraft."

At these words the doctor gave a shout of laughter, fell back on his cushions, and held his sides to restrain the convulsions of his gayety.

"Moderate this excessive mirth of which you may repent, doctor. I speak seriously."

"So much the worse! that proves that the anæsthesia and the hypochondria for which I have been treating you are turning into insanity. I must change the regimen, that is all."

"I do not know what keeps me from strangling you with my hands, you doctor of the devil," cried the count, advancing towards Cherbonneau.

The physician smiled at the count's menace, and touched him with the end of a little steel rod. Olaf-de Saville received a frightful shock, and thought his arm was broken.

"Oh! we have means to compel invalids when they resist," said Cherbonneau, turning on him the look, cold as a douche, which

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conquers madmen and subdues the lion. "Go home, take a bath, and this excitement will pass away."

Confused by the electric shock, Olaf-de Saville left Dr. Cherbonneau's, more upset and uncertain than ever. He had himself driven to Passy to consult Dr. B.

To this celebrated physician he said, "I am the prey of a strange hallucination; when I look in the glass my face does not appear to me with its usual features; the objects which surround me are changed; I do not recognize either the walls or the furniture of my room; it seems to me that I am not myself but some one else."

"Under what aspect do you see yourself?" asked the physician; "the delusion may come from the eyes or from the brain."

"I see myself with black hair, dark blue eyes, and a pale face framed by a beard."

"A passport description could not be more exact: you have neither mental hallucination nor perverted sight. You are, in fact, just as you describe."

"Oh, no! I have really fair hair, black eyes, tanned skin, and a slight mustache à la hongroise."

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"Here," replied the physician, "begins an alteration of the mental faculties."

"Nevertheless, doctor, I am not in the least insane."

"Quite true. It is only sane people who come to me of themselves. A little fatigue, some excess in study or pleasure, has caused this trouble. You are mistaken; the vision is real, the idea chimerical: instead of being fair and seeing yourself dark, you are dark and think yourself fair."

"Still, I am sure of being Count Olaf Labinski, but since yesterday every one calls me Octave de Saville."

"That is precisely what I said," answered the doctor. "You are M. de Saville, and you imagine yourself to be Count Labinski, whom I remember to have seen, and who, as you say, is fair. That explains perfectly why you see yourself in the mirror with another face; this face which is yours does not correspond with your idea and surprises you. Remember this, that every one calls you M. de Saville, and consequently does not share your belief. Come and spend a fortnight here; the baths, the rest, the



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walks under the large trees, will dissipate this annoying impression."

The count bowed and promised to come again. He no longer knew what to think. He returned to the apartment in the Rue Saint Lazare, and by chance saw on the table the invitation of the Countess Labinska, which Octave had shown to M. Cherbonneau.

"With this talisman," he cried to himself, "I can see her to-morrow."

## IX

WHEN the real Count Labinski, chased from his terrestrial paradise by the false guardian angel who stood on the threshold, had been taken to his carriage by the servants, the transformed Octave went back to the little cream-and-gold salon to wait the countess' leisure.

Leaning against a white marble mantel of which the hearth was filled with flowers, he saw himself reflected in the depths of the glass placed on a gilt-legged console opposite. Though he was in the secret of his metamorphosis, or, to speak more exactly, of his transposition, he had some difficulty in persuading himself that this image, so different from his own, was the reflection of his present form, and he could not turn his eyes from the phantom stranger who yet had become himself. He gazed at himself and saw some one else. Involuntarily

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he looked to see if the Count Olaf were not leaning on the mantel beside him and thus throwing his reflection in the mirror. But he was quite alone. Dr. Cherbonneau had done the thing thoroughly.

After a few minutes, Octave-Labinski ceased to consider the marvelous avatar which had placed his soul in the body of Prascovie's husband; his thoughts took a turn more conformable to his situation. This incredible event, of which the wildest visionary would not in his delirium have dared to dream, had been brought about. He was to find himself in the presence of the beautiful and adored being, and she would not repulse him! The only combination which could unite his happiness with the immaculate virtue of the countess was achieved!

At the approach of this supreme moment his soul underwent the most dreadful agony and anxiety; the timidity of true love made it as weak as were it still in the despised body of Octave de Saville.

The entrance of the maid put an end to his combat with this tumult of thoughts. At sight of her he could not control a ner-

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vous start, and the blood surged to his heart when she said,—

“Her ladyship can receive you now, sir.”

Octave-Labinski followed the woman, for he was unfamiliar with the different parts of the house and did not wish to betray his ignorance by taking uncertain steps. The maid showed him into a good-sized room; it was a dressing-room ornamented with all the most delicate refinements of luxury. A set of wardrobes in precious wood carved by Knecht and Lienhart, formed a sort of architectural wainscoting, a portico of capricious style, rare elegance, and finished execution. The doors were separated by columns around which heart-shaped leaves of convolvuli and bell-like flowers, cut with infinite skill, twined in ascending spirals. In these wardrobes were kept gowns of velvet and of silk, cashmeres, wraps, laces, cloaks of sable and blue fox, hats of a thousand shapes, and all the belongings of a pretty woman.

Opposite, the same idea was repeated with this difference, that the smooth panels were replaced by mirrors revolving on hinges like the leaves of a screen, so that it

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was possible to see the face, profile, or back, and to judge of the effect of a bodice or a head-dress. On the third side was a long toilet-table with an alabaster-onyx top, where the silver faucets spouted hot and cold water into huge Japanese bowls set in an open-work rim of the same metal; Bohemian glass bottles sparkling in the candle-light like diamonds and rubies, contained essences and perfumes.

The walls and ceiling were tufted with Nile green satin, like the inside of a jewel-case. A thick Smyrna rug, with softly blending colors, wadded the floor.

On a green velvet pedestal in the centre of the room was set a large chest of fantastic shape in Khorassan steel, chased, embossed, and engraved with arabesques amplified enough to make the ornamentation of the Ambassadors' Hall in the Alhambra appear simplicity itself. Oriental art seemed to have done its best in this marvelous work, in which the fairy fingers of the Peris must surely have taken part. It was in this chest that the Countess Prascovie Labinska inclosed her ornaments, jewels fit for a queen, which she wore rare-

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ly, thinking, with reason, that they were not worth the place they covered. Her woman's instinct told her that she was too beautiful to need magnificence! In consequence, they only saw the light on solemn occasions when the hereditary pomp of the ancient Labinski family had to appear in all its splendor. Diamonds never lay more idle.

Near the window, whose ample curtains hung in heavy folds, the Countess Prascovie Labinska, radiantly fair and beautiful, was seated at a lace-covered dressing-table, before a mirror held towards her by two angels carved by Mlle. de Fauveau with the fragile elegance which characterizes that lady's talent; two candlabra, each with six candles, flooded her with light. An ideally fine Algerian burnous, with blue and white stripes in alternation opaque and transparent, enveloped her like a fleecy cloud; the thin material had slipped from the satiny tissue of the shoulders, and revealed the lines of a throat beside which the snow-white neck of a swan would have appeared gray indeed. The opening of the folds was filled by the laces of a batiste gown, a noc-

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turnal attire without a restraining belt. The countess' hair was undone, and fell behind her in a mass as opulent as the mantle of an empress. The flowing golden locks, from which Venus Aphrodite kneeling in her mother-of-pearl shell wrung the drops when she rose like a flower from the blue Ionian Sea, were not more blonde or luxurious! Blend Titian's amber and Paul Veronese's silver with the golden varnish of Rembrandt, make the sun shine through a topaz, and yet you will not obtain the marvelous tint of her wonderful hair, which seemed to give out light instead of receiving it, and which would have merited more than did Berenice's to shine, a new constellation, among the ancient planets! Two women were dividing, smoothing, and rolling it in coils carefully arranged that the contact with the pillow should not rumple it.

During this delicate operation the countess balanced on the end of her foot a Turkish slipper of white velvet embroidered with gold, small enough to create jealousy in the hearts of the Sultan's khanouns and odalisques. Now and then, throwing back

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the silky folds of the burnous, she uncovered her white arm, and with a gently impatient motion pushed aside some stray lock of hair.

Reclining in this indolent posture she recalled the graceful figures in the Greek toilet scenes which decorate antique vases, and of which no artist has since been able to reproduce the pure and correct outlines or the youthful and slender beauty. She was a thousand times more seductive than in the garden of the Villa Salviati at Florence, and had Octave not been already wildly in love with her he would then have infallibly become so; but happily, nothing can be added to the infinite.

At sight of her Octave-Labinski acted as if he had seen the most terrible spectacle; his knees knocked together and almost gave way under him. His mouth grew parched. Distress seized him at the throat like the hand of a Thug, and flames danced before his eyes. Her loveliness magnetized him.

Reflecting, however, that this stupid and bewildered manner fit for a repulsed lover was perfectly ridiculous in a husband, no matter how much in love he might still be



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with his wife, he made a courageous effort, and stepped firmly enough towards the countess.

“ Ah! it is you, Olaf! How late you are this evening!” said the countess without turning, for her head was held by the long braids which the maids were twisting. Freeing it from the folds of the burnous, she offered him one of her beautiful hands. Octave-Labinski grasped her soft, flower-like hand, carried it to his lips, and pressed it with a long, burning kiss,—his whole soul concentrating itself on the little spot.

It is impossible to know what sensitiveness of the epidermis, what instinct of divine modesty, what unconscious intuition of the heart warned the countess; but a crimson flush spread swiftly over her face. Her throat and her arms took on the hue of the snow on the mountain-tops at the sun's earliest kiss. She started, and, half angry, half ashamed, slowly withdrew her hand. Octave's lips had given her the impression of a hot iron. She quickly recovered herself, however, and smiled at her childishness.

“ You do not answer me, dear Olaf. Do

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you know that it is over six hours since I saw you? You neglect me," she added, in a reproachful tone; "formerly you would not have deserted me so for a whole long evening. Did you even think of me?"

"All the time," replied Octave-Labinski.

"Oh, no, not all the time. I know when you think of me even at a distance. This evening, for instance, I was alone, seated at the piano, playing a piece of Weber's to soothe my dullness with music; in the sonorous pulsations of the notes your spirit hovered about me for several minutes; but at the last chord it flew away I know not whither, and did not return. Do not contradict me, I am sure of what I say."

Prascovie in fact was not mistaken. It was the moment when Count Olaf Labinski, at Dr. Cherbonneau's, had leaned over the magical glass of water evoking with all the force of a fixed idea an adored image. From that instant, submerged in the fathomless ocean of a magnetic slumber, the count had been without thought, feeling, or volition.

Having finished the countess' toilet, the maids withdrew. Octave-Labinski re-

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mained standing, gazing at Prascovie with a look of passion.

Constrained and oppressed by his expression, the countess wrapped herself in her burnous like Polymnià in her draperies. Only her head appeared above the blue-and-white folds, uneasy but charming.

No human penetration could divine the mysterious displacement of souls performed by Dr. Cherbonneau by means of the Sannyâsi Brahma-Logum formula; still Prascovie did not recognize in the eyes of Octave-Labinski her husband's usual expression, that look of love, chaste, calm, equal, eternal as the love of angels. This look was kindled by an earthly passion which troubled her and made her blush. She did not understand what it was, but she knew something had happened. A thousand wild suppositions crossed her mind. Was she no longer for Olaf anything but a common woman, desired for her beauty like a courtesan? Had the sublime accord of their souls been broken by some dissonance of which she was ignorant? Did Olaf love another, or had the corruptions of Paris sullied the purity of his heart? She asked herself

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these questions rapidly without being able to answer them in a satisfactory manner, and she told herself she was foolish, but still she felt afraid. A secret terror invaded her as though she were in the presence of some danger, unknown, but divined by that second sight of the mind which it is always wrong to disobey.

Nervous and agitated, she arose and went towards the door of the bedroom. The pseudo-count accompanied her as Othello leads away Desdemona at each exit in Shakespeare's play, with one arm around her waist; but when she was on the threshold she turned white and cold as a statue, stopped a second, gave a timorous glance at the young man, then entered, closed the door quickly, and shot the bolt.

"Octave's look!" she cried, and sank fainting on a sofa. As her senses came back she said to herself: "But how is it that this look which I have never forgotten shines to-night in Olaf's eyes? Why have I seen its gloomy and despairing flame sparkle in the pupils of my husband? Is Octave dead? Is it his soul which gleamed before me an instant to bid me farewell on

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leaving this world? Olaf! Olaf! If I was mistaken, if I foolishly yielded to empty fears, you will forgive me; but if I had welcomed you to-night I should have thought I was giving myself to another."

The countess assured herself that the door was well bolted, lighted a pendent lamp, and with a sensation of indefinable anguish like a timid child she hid herself in the bed. Towards morning she fell asleep; but strange and incoherent dreams tormented her restless slumber. Ardent eyes—Octave's eyes—stared at her from a mist, and darted at her forks of fire; while at the foot of her bed crouched a black and wrinkled figure, muttering syllables in an unknown tongue. Count Olaf also appeared in this absurd dream, but clothed in a form which was not his own.

We will not attempt to portray Octave's disappointment when he found himself facing a closed door and heard the bolt grating inside. His supreme hope had failed. He had had recourse to strange and terrible methods; he had surrendered himself to a magician, perhaps a demon, risking his life in this world, and his soul in the next, to

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conquer a woman who escaped him, though rendered defenseless by the sorcery of India. Repulsed as a lover, he was not more fortunate as a husband; Prascovic's invincible purity thwarted the most infernal plots. On the door-sill of the bedchamber she had seemed to him like one of Swedenborg's white angels anathematizing the Evil Spirit.

He could not stay all night in this ridiculous position, so he looked for the count's apartment. At the end of a suite of rooms he found one which contained an ebony columned bed with tapestry curtains, where amid the scrolls and flowers was embroidered a coat-of-arms. The panoplies of Oriental armor, knights' cuirasses and helmets, touched by the reflection of a lamp, threw vague glimmers into the shadow. Bohemian leather stamped with gold gleamed on the walls. Three or four huge carved arm-chairs and a heavy cabinet loaded with ornaments completed this mediæval furniture, which would not have been out of place in the great hall of a Gothic manor. On the count's part this was not a frivolous imitation of the

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fashion, but a hallowed memory. The room exactly reproduced the one he had inhabited at his mother's, and though often laughed at about it,—this fifth-act scenery,—he had always refused to change its style.

Octave-Labinski, exhausted with fatigue and emotion, flung himself on the bed and fell asleep, cursing Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau.

Fortunately, the morning brought with it serener thoughts; he promised himself to act hereafter in a more moderate fashion, to dull his glances, and to assume the manners of a husband. Aided by the count's valet, he dressed himself in a plain and simple costume, and went quietly down to the dining-room to breakfast with the countess.

## X

• OCTAVE-LABINSKI walked in the footsteps of the valet, for in this house of which he was the apparent master he did not know where the dining-room was. It was a vast room on the ground floor, opening on the court, and in its noble and severe style recalled both an abbey and a manor. Dark oak wainscoting, arranged in symmetrical designs, reached to the ceiling, where plaster moulded in relief formed hexagonal panels painted blue and delicately arabesqued in gold. On the long panels of the wood-work Philippe Rousseau had painted the four seasons symbolically, not in mythological figures, but by trophies of still-life composed of the fruits appropriate to each season of the year. Game by Jadin corresponded to the fruits of Rousseau, and above each painting gleamed like the disk of a shield an immense plate by Bernard



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Palissy or Léonard de Limoges, of Japanese porcelain, Majolica or Arabian pottery, the glaze opalescent with all the colors of the prism. Stags' antlers and aurochs' horns alternated with the faience, and at each end of the room rose a large sideboard, as high as the altar-pieces in Spanish churches, of elaborate architecture and carved decoration, and rivaling the most beautiful works of Berruguete, Cornejo Duque, and Verbruggen. On their shelves glittered in confusion the antique silver of the Labinski family. Pitchers with fantastic handles, salt-cellars of ancient shape, large bowls, drinking cups, centre pieces shaped by the quaint German fancy, all worthy of a place amid the treasures of the Dresden Green Vault. Opposite the antique plate shone the marvelous products of modern silverware. The masterpieces of Wagner, Duponchel, Rudolphi, and Froment-Meurice; enameled tea-sets with figures by Feuchère and Vechte; chased salvers, champagne coolers with vine-leaved handles, and bacchanals in bas-relief, chafing-dishes as graceful as the Pompeian tripods, not to mention the Bohemian crystal, the Vene-

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tian glass, and the services in old Saxe and old Sèvres.

Oak chairs covered with green morocco were ranged along the walls, and over a table of which the feet were carved like eagle's claws there fell a clear, equal light through the ground white glass set in the centre panel of the ceiling. A transparent wreath of vine-leaves framed this milky square with green foliage. On the table, set in Russian fashion, the fruit was already placed, surrounded by a garland of violets; and under silver covers that were polished like emirs' helmets, the viands awaited the knife and fork. A Moscow samovar hissed forth a jet of steam; and two footmen in knee-breeches and white cravats stood silent and immovable behind the two arm-chairs, facing each other like domestic statues.

Octave, in order not to be involuntarily preoccupied by the novelty of objects with which he ought to have been familiar, took in all these things at a glance.

A rustle on the marble slabs, a murmur of silk, made him turn his head. It was

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the Countess Prascovic Labinska who approached and seated herself, after making him an amicable little gesture. She wore a morning gown of pale green and white plaid silk trimmed with a pinked rouching of the same material. Her hair lay in thick waves on her temples, and was gathered at the nape of her neck in a golden coil resembling the scroll of an Ionian pillar, a style as simple as it was dignified, and which a Greek sculptor could not have wished to change. Her rose-tinted cheeks were delicately blanched by the evening's emotion and the agitated sleep of the night. An imperceptible aureole of shadow encircled her eyes, usually so clear and calm. She had a weary, languid air; but thus softened, her beauty was only the more penetrating; it acquired a human touch, the goddess became a woman, the angel, folding her wings, ceased to soar.

Octave, grown prudent, veiled the flame in his eyes with a look of indifference.

The countess, with a slight motion of the shoulders as if chilled by a remnant of fever, stretched out her small bronze-

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slipped foot to the silky wool of a rug that had been placed under the table to neutralize the cold contact of the mosaic of white and Veronese variegated marble which paved the dining-room. Fixing her blue eyes on her companion, whom she took for her husband, for with the daylight had vanished the presentiments, the fears, and the phantoms of the night, she spoke a sentence in Polish in a tender, melodious voice, rich with chaste caresses. In moments of affection and intimacy she often used the dear maternal language with the count, especially in the presence of French servants to whom this idiom was unfamiliar.

The Parisian Octave was well up in Latin, Italian, Spanish, and knew a few words of English; but, like all Gallo-Romans, he was entirely ignorant of the Slavic tongues. The bristling bastion of consonants which protects the rare vowels in Polish would have inhibited his access even had he wished to approach it. In Florence the countess had always spoken to him in French or Italian, and the idea of learning the language in which Mickie-

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wicz has almost equaled Byron had not occurred to him. It is impossible to think of everything.

On hearing this phrase, there took place in the count's brain, inhabited by the mind of Octave, a very singular phenomenon. The sounds, so strange to the Parisian, following the folds of a Slav ear reached the usual place where Olaf's mind received and transferred them into thoughts, and evoked there a sort of physical remembrance. Octave had a confused idea of their meaning; words hidden in the cerebral circumvolutions, in the secret recesses of memory, arose buzzing, ready to reply; but these vague reminiscences, failing to communicate with the mind, soon dispersed, and all was again a blank. The poor lover's embarrassment was dreadful; in taking the form of Count Olaf Labinski, he had not dreamed of this complication, and he realized that in seizing his position he had exposed himself to severe disasters.

Astonished at Octave's silence, and fancying that through some momentary abstraction he had not heard her, Prascovie

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repeated her remark slowly and in a louder tone.

If he heard more plainly the sound of the words, the pseudo-count understood their signification none the better. He made desperate efforts to guess what it might be about, but for those who do not know them the dense languages of the North have no transparency, and if a Frenchman can surmise what an Italian says, he is deaf when listening to a Pole. In spite of himself, a violent blush covered his cheeks, he bit his lips, and to keep himself in countenance hacked furiously at the meat on his plate.

“One would certainly suppose, my sweet prince,” said the countess this time in French, “that you do not hear, or that you do not understand me.”

“Really,” faltered Octave-Labinski, hardly knowing what he said, “that terrible language is so difficult!”

“Difficult! Yes! perhaps it is for strangers; but for those who have stammered it at their mother’s knee it springs from the lips like the breath of life, and with the unconsciousness of thought.”

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“Yes, doubtless; but there are times when it seems to me as if I no longer know it.”

“What are you saying, Olaf? What! you have forgotten the language of your ancestors, the language of the Fatherland, the language which enables you to recognize your brothers among men, and,” added she in a lower voice, “the language in which you first told me you loved me!”

“The habit of using another tongue” . . . ventured Octave-Labinski, at the end of his arguments.

“Olaf,” answered the countess reproachfully, “I see that Paris has spoiled you; I was right in not wishing to come here. Who could have told me that when the noble Count Labinski returned to his domains he would no longer know how to reply to the felicitations of his vassals?”

Prascovie’s charming countenance assumed a doleful expression; for the first time sadness cast its shadow on her angelically smooth brow. This strange forgetfulness wounded her inmost soul, and seemed almost treasonable.

The rest of the breakfast passed in si-

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lence. Prascovie frowned on the man whom she thought the count. Octave was in torment, for he dreaded other questions which he would be compelled to leave unanswered. At last the countess rose and returned to her rooms.

Left alone, Octave played with the handle of a knife which he was tempted to thrust in his heart, for his situation was unbearable. He had counted on a surprise, and now he found himself involved in the to him issueless labyrinths of an unknown existence. In assuming the body of Count Olaf Labinski he should also have taken from him his previous ideas, the languages he knew, his childhood's memories, the thousand intimate details which compose a man's self, the links binding his existence to the existences of others. But for that, all Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau's knowledge would not have sufficed. What a fate! actually to be in this paradise whose threshold he had hardly dared glance at from afar, to live under the same roof with Prascovie, see her, speak to her, kiss her hand with the very lips of her husband, and yet be unable to deceive her divine modesty, and to be-



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tray himself every instant by some inexplicable stupidity! "It was written above that Prascovie would never love me! And yet I have made the greatest sacrifice to which mortal pride can descend; I have renounced my *self*, I have consented to profit under a strange form by caresses destined for another!"

At this point in his monologue a groom bowed before him and asked, with every sign of the deepest respect, what horse he would ride. Seeing that the count did not answer, the man, much frightened at his own boldness, risked murmuring,—

"Vultur or Rustem? they have not been out for a week."

"Rustem," replied Octave-Labinski, as he would have said Vultur had not the last name clung to his distraught mind.

He dressed for riding and started for the Bois de Boulogne, wishing to give his shaken nerves a bath of fresh air.

Rustem, a magnificent animal of the Nedji race, that carried on his breast, in an Oriental bag of gold-embroidered velvet, titles to a nobility extending back to the

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first years of the hegira, did not need to be roused. He seemed to understand his rider's thoughts, and as soon as he had left the pavements and struck the bridle-paths he started off, fleet, as an arrow, before Octave had touched him with the spur. After two hours of hard riding the horseman and his beast returned to the hotel, the one quite calm, and the other fuming, with scarlet nostrils.

• The pseudo-count joined the countess, whom he found in her drawing-room, dressed in a gown of white silk flounced to the waist, a knot of ribbon in her hair.

It was Thursday, the day on which she remained at home and received her visitors.

"Well," she said to him, with a gracious smile, for her beautiful lips could not pout for long, "have you regained your memory galloping in the alleys of the Bois?"

"No, my dear," replied Octave-Labinski, "but I have a confession to make."

"Do I not know in advance all your thoughts? Are we no longer transparent to each other?"

"Yesterday I went to see the physician who is so much talked about."

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“Yes, Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau, who made a long stay in India, and has, they say, learned from the Brahmans a lot of secrets, each more marvelous than the other. You even wished to take me, but I am not curious; for I know you love me, and that knowledge is all I require.”

“He made such singular experiments before me, he produced such miraculous effects, that my mind is still disturbed by them. This eccentric fellow, who has an irresistible power at his disposal, threw me into a magnetic sleep so profound that on awakening I no longer had the same faculties. I had lost the remembrance of many things. The past floated in a mist of obscurity; my love for you alone remained intact.”

“You were wrong, Olaf, to put yourself under the influence of this physician. God, who has created the soul, has the right to touch it,” said the countess in a grave tone; “but man in attempting to do so commits an impious action. I hope that you will not go back there, and I hope, too, that when I say something agreeable to

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you—in Polish—you will understand me as you once did.”

During his ride Octave had conceived this excuse of magnetism to palliate the errors which he could not fail to make in his new life. But his troubles were not ended. A servant opening the door announced a visitor.

“M. Octave de Saville.”

Though he might have expected this meeting one day or another, at these simple words the real Octave trembled as if the trumpet of the last judgment had suddenly sounded in his ear. He had need to call up all his courage, and to tell himself that he had the best of the situation, to prevent himself from reeling. Instinctively he clutched the back of a chair, and thus managed to stand apparently firm and tranquil.

Count Olaf, clothed in the form of Octave, advanced towards the countess with a deep bow.

“The Count Labinski . . . M. Octave de Saville,” said the countess, presenting the gentlemen.

The two men bowed coldly, and over the

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marble mask of worldly politeness which sometimes covers such evil passions shot savage glances at each other.

“You have grown formal since Florence days, Monsieur Octave,” said the countess in a familiar and friendly tone, “and I was afraid I should leave Paris without seeing you. You were more assiduous at the Villa Salviati, and you were numbered among the faithful.”

“Madam,” the pseudo-Octave answered constrainedly, “I have traveled, I have been ailing, ill even, and on receiving your gracious invitation I asked myself whether I should profit by it, for one must not be an egotist and abuse the indulgence that people are good enough to have for a bore.”

“Bored perhaps, but never a bore,” replied the countess. “You have always been melancholy; yet does not one of your poets say of melancholy,

‘After idleness, ’t is the best of ills’?”

“It is a report which happy people spread to dispense themselves from pitying those who suffer,” said Olaf-de Saville.

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As if to beg his pardon for the love with which she had involuntarily inspired him, the countess cast a look of ineffable sweetness on the count, shut up in Octave's body.

“You think me more frivolous than I am; all real pain has my pity, and if I cannot relieve, I can at least commiserate. I would like to have had you happy, dear Monsieur Octave; but why have you immured yourself in sadness, why have you refused the life which came to you with its joys, its seductions, and its duties? Why have you refused my proffered friendship?”

These simple and sincere phrases impressed the two listeners differently. Octave heard in them the confirmation of the judgment pronounced in the Salviati garden by this perfect mouth unsoiled by lies; and Olaf, a proof of his wife's unalterable virtue, which nothing but diabolical cunning could overcome. And a sudden madness seized him on seeing his spectre animated by another soul installed in his own house. He sprang at the throat of the false count.

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“Thief, brigand, rogue, give me back my body!”

At this most extraordinary action the countess rushed to the bell and the footmen carried out the count.

“That poor Octave has gone crazy!” said Prascovie while Olaf, struggling vainly, was being taken away.

“Yes,” answered the real Octave, “crazy with love! Countess, you are decidedly too beautiful!”

## XI

Two hours after this scene the false count received from the real one a letter bearing the seal of Octave de Saville,—the unhappy dispossessed Olaf had no other at his disposal. It produced an odd effect on the usurper of Count Labinski's body to open a missive sealed with his own crest, but everything had to be peculiar in this abnormal position.

The letter contained the following lines, traced by a stiff hand, in a writing which looked like counterfeit, for Olaf was not accustomed to holding a pen with Octave's fingers:—

Read by another than yourself, this letter would appear to be dated from a lunatic asylum, but you will understand it. An inexplicable combination of circumstances never before produced, perhaps,



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since the earth has turned about the sun forces me to act as no man has ever done. I write to myself and put on the address a name which is my own, a name which with my person you have stolen from me. I am ignorant of the plot of which I am the victim and of the circle of infernal illusions into which I have put my foot. You, of course, know all about it.

“If you are not a coward, the mouth of my pistol or the point of my sword will demand of you this secret on a ground where every man, honorable or infamous, answers the questions put to him. To-morrow one of us must have ceased to see the light of day. The universe is now too narrow for us both. I will kill my body filled with your lying spirit, or you will kill yours, wherein my soul rages at being imprisoned.

“Do not try to prove me crazy. I shall have the strength to be reasonable, and everywhere I meet you I will insult you with the politeness of a gentleman and the coolness of a diplomat. The Count Olaf Labinski’s mustache may displease M. Octave de Saville, and, every day, feet are trodden on at the exit of the Opéra. I

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trust that my words, though obscure, will have no ambiguity for you, and that my seconds will come to a perfect understanding with yours as to the hour, the place, and the conditions of the duel."

This letter threw Octave into a quandary. He could not refuse the count's challenge, and yet it went against him to fight with himself, for he had kept a sort of tenderness for his old envelope. The idea of being forced into this duel by some open insult made him decide to accept it, though if necessary he could have put his adversary into a lunatic's strait-jacket and thus stayed his arm; but his delicacy revolted at such a method. If carried along by an overpowering passion he had committed a reprehensible action and hidden the lover under the disguise of the husband to triumph over a virtue above all seduction, he was still a man not without honor and courage. Besides, he had not taken this extreme step until, after three years of struggle and suffering, the moment had arrived when his life, consumed by love, was escaping him. He did not know the count; he was not his friend, he owed him noth-

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ing, and he had profited by the hazardous means which Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau had offered to him.

Where find seconds? Of course among the count's friends; but Octave in the one day he had lived in the house had had no chance to meet them.

On the mantelpiece were two vases of china with gold dragons for handles. One held rings, pins, seals, and other trifling jewels,—the other, visiting cards, on which, under the coronet of duke, marquis, or count, were inscribed by skilled engravers in Gothic, round, or English type a multitude of names, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, German, Italian, Spanish, and attesting the roving existence of the count, who had friends in every land.

Octave took two hap-hazard: Count Zamoieczki and the Marquis de Sepulveda. He ordered the carriage, and drove to their addresses. He found them both in. They did not appear surprised at the request of the man whom they thought Count Olaf Labinski. Totally devoid of the sensitiveness of middle-class seconds, they did not ask if the affair could be compromised, and

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like the perfect gentlemen they were maintained a silence full of good taste as to the motive of the quarrel.

On his side, the real count, or, if you like it better, the pseudo-Octave, was a prey to a similar embarrassment. He remembered Alfred Humbert and Gustave Raimbaud, whose breakfast he had refused to attend, and he requested them to help him in this encounter. The two young men showed considerable surprise at finding their friend involved in a duel, for he had hardly left his room in a year, and they knew his character was more pacific than quarrelsome. But when he had told them that it was a mortal combat, they made no further objections, and went to the Hotel Labinski.

The conditions were soon arranged. The adversaries having declared that sword or pistol suited them equally well, a gold coin thrown in the air decided the weapon. They were to meet in the Avenue des Poiteaux of the Bois de Boulogne, near the rustic thatched summer-house, where the fine gravel offers a favorable arena for this sort of combat.

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When all was settled it was nearly midnight, and Octave went to the door of Prascovie's apartment. As on the previous evening it was bolted, and the countess' mocking voice flung this sarcasm at him through the door,—

“Come back when you know Polish; I am too patriotic to receive a foreigner.”

Notified by Octave, Dr. Cherbonneau came in the morning, carrying a case of surgical instruments and a roll of bandages. They entered a carriage together, MM. Zamoieczki and de Sepulveda following in their coupé.

“Well, my dear Octave,” said the physician; “so the adventure is already turning into tragedy? I ought to have let the count sleep in your body on my divan for a week. I have prolonged magnetic slumbers beyond that limit. But even when one has learned wisdom from the Brahmans, the Pandit, and the Sanniasys of India, one always forgets something, and imperfections are found in the best combined plans. But how did Countess Prascovie welcome her Florence lover thus disguised?”

“I think,” replied Octave, “that either

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she recognized me notwithstanding my metamorphosis, or else her guardian angel whispered in her ear to distrust me. I found her as chaste, as cold, as pure, as polar snow. Doubtless her exquisite nature divined a stranger under the beloved form of her husband. I told you truly that you could do nothing for me; indeed I am even more unhappy than when you paid me your first visit."

"Who can fix a boundary to the soul's power," said Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau thoughtfully, "especially when it is weakened by no earthly preoccupation, soiled by no human tie, and keeps itself in the glow and contemplation of love just as it left the Creator's hands? Yes, you are right; she recognized you, her heavenly modesty shrank at the look of desire, and instinctively veiled itself with its white wings. I pity you, my poor Octave! Your wound is indeed immedicable. Were we in the Middle Ages, I should say, Get thee to a monastery."

"I have often thought of it," replied Octave.

Presently they reached the meeting

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ground. The counterfeit Octave's brougham was already at the place designated.

At this early hour the Bois presented a really picturesque aspect, which later in the day fashion makes it lose. Summer was at that stage when the sun has not yet had time to darken the green of the foliage; fresh, translucent tints, washed by the night's dew, variegated the forest, and gave out an odor of tender vegetation. At this spot the trees are particularly fine; perhaps because they have encountered a more favorable soil, or because they are the only survivors of some old plantation. Their vigorous trunks, stained with moss or glossed with a silvery bark, clutch the earth with gnarled roots, and project oddly bent branches. They might have served as models for the studies of artists and decorators who go much farther to seek less remarkable ones. A few birds, which later the day's noises silence, chirped gayly in the leafy retreat; a timid rabbit crossed the gravel of the alley in three bounds and ran to hide in the grass, frightened at the sound of the wheels. r

These poems of nature surprised in un-

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dress occupied the two adversaries and their seconds very little, as you can imagine. The sight of Dr. Balthazar Cherbouneau made a disagreeable impression on Count Olaf Labinski, but he recovered himself quickly.

The swords were measured, their places assigned to the combatants, who after taking off their coats fell into position.

“Ready!” the seconds cried.

In every duel, no matter what the fury of the adversaries may be, there is a moment of solemn immobility: each combatant silently studies his enemy and makes his plan, reflecting on the attack and preparing to parry and thrust. Then the swords seek, provoke, and feel each other, so to speak, without separating; that lasts several seconds, which seem minutes, hours, to the anxiety of the assistants.

The conditions of this duel, apparently commonplace to the spectators, were so abnormal for the combatants that they remained thus on guard longer than is customary. Each had in front of him his own body, and must drive the steel into flesh



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which had belonged to himself two days before.

The fight was complicated by a sort of unforeseen suicide, and, though both were brave, yet Octave and the count felt an instinctive horror at standing, sword in hand, face to face with their own phantoms, and ready to fall on themselves. The impatient seconds were about to cry again, "Gentlemen, are you ready!" when at last the blades crossed.

Several attacks were parried with agility on each side.

Thanks to his military education, the count was a skillful fencer; he had pinked the plastron of the most famous masters. But if he still had the method he no longer possessed the muscular arm which had routed the Mourides of Schamyl; it was Octave's weak wrist which wielded his sword.

Octave on the contrary felt, in the count's body, an unaccustomed strength, and though less expert, he always parried the steel which sought his breast.

It was in vain that Olaf strove to touch his adversary and risked thrusts which

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exposed himself. Octave, cooler and more steady, baffled every feint.

The count began to get excited, and his play grew nervous and uneven. Though he would then have to remain Octave de Saville, he wanted to kill this deceptive body which might even deceive Prascovie—a thought which lashed him into an inexpressible rage.

At the risk of being run through, he tried a straight thrust to reach, through his own body, the life and heart of his rival; but Octave's sword wound round his with such a quick, sharp, irresistible movement that the steel was wrenched from his hand, and springing in the air fell several steps away.

Olaf's life was at Octave's disposal; he had only to thrust and run him through.

The count's face quivered; not that he feared death, but he thought that he was about to leave his wife to this body-thief whom nothing hereafter could unmask.

Far from profiting by his advantage, Octave threw down his sword, and motioning to the seconds not to interfere walked towards the stupefied count, whom he took

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by the arm and dragged into the depth of the wood.

“What do you want with me?” said the count. “Why not kill me when you have the chance? Why not continue the duel after letting me recover my sword if it revolts you to strike an unarmed man? You know that the sun should not cast the shadows of both of us on the ground, and that the earth must receive one or the other.”

“Listen to me patiently,” replied Octave. “Your happiness is in my hands. I can keep forever this body in which I dwell to-day and which in legitimate propriety belongs to you. It suits me to acknowledge this now that there are no witnesses near us, and only the wild birds, who never repeat, can hear. Count Olaf Labinski, whom I represent as well as I can, is a better fencer than Octave de Saville, whose form you now have, and which I, much to my regret, would be obliged to suppress. This death, though not real, as my soul would survive, would desolate my mother.”

Recognizing the truth of these remarks,

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the count maintained an acquiescent silence.

“If I should oppose it,” continued Octave, “you would never succeed in reintegrating your identity; you see in what your two attempts ended. Other trials would stamp you as a monomaniac. No one would believe a word of your allegations, and, as you have already been able to convince yourself, when you pretended to be Count Olaf Labinski every one would laugh in your face. You would be shut up, and you would pass the rest of your life protesting under the shower-bath that you were actually the husband of the beautiful Countess Prascovie Labinska. Compassionate souls would say on hearing you: Poor Octave! And you would be disowned like Balzac’s Chabert who wished to prove he was not dead.”

This was all so mathematically true that the discouraged count let his head fall on his breast.

“As you are at present Octave de Saville you have doubtless searched his desk and rummaged among his papers, and you are not ignorant that for three years he has

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nourished for the Countess Prascovie Labinska a desperate, hopeless love, which he has tried in vain to tear from his heart, and which will only leave him with his life, unless it follows him to the tomb."

"Yes, I know it," said the count, biting his lip.

"Well, to reach her I have employed terrible means, on which a delirious passion alone would venture. Dr. Cherbonneau has attempted for me a task that would startle the thaumaturgists of the universe. After putting us both to sleep he changed the envelopes of our souls. But in vain! I will return you your body: Prascovie does not love me! Under the husband's form she recognized the lover's soul; her look was the same on the threshold of the conjugal apartment as in the garden of the Villa Salviati."

Octave's tone betrayed such true sorrow that the count had faith in his words.

"I am a lover," added Octave, smiling, "and not a thief, and as the only thing which I desired in this world cannot belong to me, I do not see why I should keep your titles, castles, lands, money, horses,

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and weapons. There, give me your arm; let us appear reconciled, thank our seconds, take with us Dr. Cherbonneau, and return to the magical laboratory from which we came forth transformed. The old Brahman will know how to undo his work."

"Gentlemen," said Octave, sustaining for a little longer the part of Count Olaf Labinski, "my adversary and I have exchanged confidential explications which render the continuation of the duel useless. There is nothing like crossing swords a bit to clear the minds of sensible people."

MM. Zamoieczki and de Sepulveda reentered their carriage, and Alfred Humbert and Gustave Raimbaud regained theirs, while Count Olaf Labinski, Octave de Saville, and Dr. Cherbonneau drove at full speed towards the Rue du Regard.

## XII

DURING the transit from the Bois de Boulogne to the Rue du Regard, Octave de Saville said to Dr. Cherbonneau,—

“My dear doctor, I am about to test your science once more; you must restore our souls, each to its customary habitation. That should not be difficult for you. I hope that Count Labinski will not be angry at you for having made him change a palace for a hovel, and lodging his illustrious personality for some hours in my poor individuality. But, then, you possess a power which fears nothing.”

With an acquiescent gesture Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau replied: “The operation will be much simpler this time; the imperceptible filaments which hold the soul to the body have with you been recently broken, and have not had time to be renewed, and your minds will not form that

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obstacle which the instinctive resistance of the magnetized opposes to the magnetizer. The count will doubtless pardon an old erudite like myself for not having been able to resist the pleasure of putting in practice an experiment for which one finds but few subjects, and particularly as this attempt has only served to brilliantly confirm a virtue which carries delicacy to divination and triumphs where every other would have succumbed. If you wish, you can look on this momentary transformation as a strange dream, and perhaps, later, you will not be sorry to have experienced the odd sensation, which few men have known, of having inhabited two bodies. Metempsychosis is not a new doctrine; but before transmigrating into another existence the souls drink the cup of forgetfulness, and every one cannot, like Pythagoras, remember to have assisted at the Trojan war."

"The benefit of being reinstalled in my own individuality," the count answered politely, "equals the unpleasantness of having been expropriated from it; this is said without ill-feeling for M. Octave de Saville,



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whom I still am, and whom I am about to cease to be.”

Octave smiled with the lips of Count Labinski at this sentence which could only reach him through another's envelope, and silence established itself between these three persons whose abnormal situation rendered all conversation difficult.

The unfortunate Octave thought of his vanished hope, and his reflections were not, it must be owned, precisely rose-color. Like all repulsed lovers, he still asked himself why he was not loved—as if love had a why! The only reason one can give it is the *because*, a reply logical in its obstinate laconism, and which women oppose to all embarrassing questions. Nevertheless, he recognized his defeat, and felt that the spring of life, which for an instant Dr. Cherbonneau had renovated for him, was newly broken, and rattled in his heart like that of a watch dropped on the ground. Octave would not have caused his mother the sorrow of his suicide; and he sought a spot wherein he might extinguish his unknown grief quietly under the scientific name of a plausible illness. Had he been

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an artist, poet, or musician, he would have crystallized his pain in masterpieces; and Prascovie, robed in white, crowned with stars, like Dante's Beatrice, would have hovered about his inspiration like an angel of light; but, as has been intimated at the beginning of this story, though well instructed and gifted, Octave was not one of those chosen spirits who imprint on this earth the trace of their passage. In his obscure sublimity he only knew how to love and die.

The carriage entered the court of the old hotel in the Rue du Regard, a court whose pavement was set in green grass through which the visitors' steps had worn a path, and which the high gray walls of the building inundated with shadow, like that which falls from a cloister's arcades; Silence and Immobility, like invisible statues, watched on the threshold protecting the meditations of the erudite.

When Octave and the count had alighted, the physician jumped from the carriage with a lighter step than one would have expected from his age; without even leaning on the arm which the footman offered to

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him with that politeness which servants of large establishments affect towards old or feeble persons.

As soon as the double doors had closed on them, Olaf and Octave felt themselves wrapped in the hot atmosphere which recalled to the physician that of India, and in which only he could breathe at his ease, but which almost suffocated those who had not, like him, been for thirty years torrifed in tropical suns. The incarnations of Vishnu still leered in their frames, weirder by day than by lamplight; Shiva, the blue god, sneered on his pedestal; and Dourga, biting his callous lip with his wild boar's tusks, seemed to agitate his chaplet of skulls. The apartment retained its magical and mysterious appearance. Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau led his two subjects to the room where the first transformation had taken place. He turned the glass disk of the electric machine, shook the iron rods of the mesmeric battery, opened the hot-air registers to make the temperature rise rapidly, read two or three lines from parchments so ancient that they resembled old bark ready to crumble into dust, and, when

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several minutes had elapsed, said to Octave and the count,—

“Gentlemen, I am at your service; shall we begin?”

While the physician was making these preparations, disquieting reflections passed through the count's mind.

“When I am asleep, what is this old lugubrious-faced magician, who might be the devil himself, going to do with my soul? Will he restore it to my body, or will he carry it off to hell with him? Is not this exchange, which ought to give me back my happiness, a Machiavellian combination for some sorcery whose end escapes me? Still, my position could not be worse. Octave possesses my body, and, as he wisely remarked this morning, in reclaiming it with my present figure I should cause myself to be shut up as a lunatic. If he wished to put me definitely out of his way, he had only to drive in the point of his sword; I was disarmed, at his mercy; the justice of man could have said nothing against it; the form of the duel was perfectly regular, and it would have been done all in order. I must think of Prascovie and

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have no childish fears. Let me try the only way which is left me to regain her!"

And, like Octave, he grasped the rod which Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau presented to him.

Overpowered by the metal conductors, charged to the utmost with electric fluid, the two young men sank into an unconsciousness so profound that to any one unprepared for it it would have resembled death. The physician made the passes, performed the rites, pronounced the syllables as on the first occasion, and soon two luminous stars appeared above Octave and the count. The physician led to its original abode Count Olaf Labinski's soul, which followed the electrician's gesture with an eager flight.

During this time Octave's soul moved slowly from Olaf's body, and instead of rejoining its own, rose as if glad to be free, and appeared indifferent to its prison. The physician was touched with pity for the fluttering, winged Psyche, and asked himself if it were a kindness to bring it back to this vale of misery. In this momentary hesitation the soul continued to

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ascend. Remembering his part, M. Cherbonneau repeated with the most imperious accent the irresistible monosyllable, and made a pass pregnant with volition, but the tiny quivering spark was already out of the circle of attraction, and swiftly traversing the upper pane of the window it disappeared.

The physician ceased making efforts which he knew to be useless, and awakened the count, who, seeing himself in a mirror with his usual features, gave a cry of joy, threw a glance at Octave's immobile body to make sure that he was thoroughly clear of that envelope, and with a nod of farewell to M. Balthazar Cherbonneau rushed away.

A few seconds later the muffled roll of a carriage under the arch was heard, and Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau was alone face to face with the corpse of Octave de Saville.

"By the trunk of Ganesa!" exclaimed the pupil of the Brahman of Elephanta when the count had gone, "this is a provoking affair. I opened the cage-door, the bird flew away, and now it is already beyond the sphere of this world, so far indeed

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that the Sannyâsi Brahma-Logum himself could not overtake it, and here am I with a corpse on my hands. It is true, I can dissolve it in a corrosive bath of such strength that not an appreciable atom will remain, or I can make of it in a few hours a beautiful mummy, like those inclosed in cases covered with variegated hieroglyphs; but inquiries will be started, my dwelling searched, my chests opened, myself subjected to all sorts of tiresome questions” . . . Here a bright idea crossed the physician’s mind; he seized a pen and wrote rapidly a few lines on a sheet of paper, which he put in the drawer of his table.

The paper contained these words:

“Having neither relatives nor connections, I bequeath all my belongings to M. Octave de Saville, for whom I have a particular affection, on condition that he pays a legacy of one hundred thousand francs to the Brahmanic hospital of Ceylon for old, worn-out, and sick animals; that he gives twelve hundred francs yearly for life to my Indian and to my English servant; and that he sends the manuscript of the laws of Manu to the Mazarin library.”

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This testament made to a dead man by a living one is not the strangest thing in this story, improbable yet true; but the singularity of it will be at once explained.

The physician felt Octave de Saville's body, from which the warmth of life had not yet departed, looked in the glass, with a singularly disdainful air, at his own wrinkled face, tanned and rough like a zebra's skin, and making over his head the motion with which one throws off an old coat when the tailor brings a new one, he muttered the formula of the Sannyâsi Brahma-Logum.

Immediately, Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau's body fell to the floor as if struck by a thunderbolt, and that of Octave de Saville rose up in full strength and activity.

Octave-Cherbonneau stood for some minutes before the thin, bony, and livid carcass, which, no longer upheld by the powerful spirit that had before animated it, at once took on a look of complete senility, and rapidly assumed a cadaverous appearance.

"Farewell, poor human remnant, miserable out-at-elbow garment, frayed at every



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seam, which for seventy years I have dragged about the five parts of the globe! You did me good service, and I do not leave you without regret. One gets accustomed to living so long together! but with this young envelope, which my science will soon make robust, I can study, work, and read still a few words more in the great book before Death, saying 'It is enough!' closes it at the most interesting paragraph!"

After this funeral oration, addressed to himself, Octave-Cherbonneau went forth with a tranquil step to take possession of his new existence.

Count Olaf Labinski had returned to his house and had immediately sent to ask if the countess could receive him.

He found her in the conservatory seated on a bank of moss amid a virgin forest of exotic and tropical plants. The half-raised panes of glass admitted the warm, bright air. She was reading Novalis, one of the most subtle, rarefied, and immaterial authors which German spiritualism has produced. The countess did not like books

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which paint existence in strong, real colors; and, from having lived in a world of elegance, love, and poetry, life appeared to her a trifle coarse.

She threw down her book and slowly lifted her eyes to the count. She feared to encounter again in her husband's dark pupils that ardent, stormy look, full of mysterious thoughts, which had troubled her so much, and which had seemed to her—foolish apprehension—the look of another!

In Olaf's eyes shone a serene joy, and a pure, chaste love burned in them with a steady fire; the stranger soul, which had so mysteriously changed the expression of his features, was gone forever. Prascovie at once recognized her adored Olaf, and a quick blush of pleasure colored her transparent cheeks. Though she was ignorant of the transformations performed by Dr. Cherbonneau, her delicate sensitiveness had unconsciously been aware of all these changes.

“What are you reading, dear Prascovie?” said Olaf, lifting from the moss the book bound in blue morocco. “Ah! the

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history of Henri d'Ofterdingen,—it is the same volume that I went full gallop to get you at Mohilev, one day when you had expressed a wish for it at dinner. At midnight it was on the table beside your lamp; but poor Ralph was broken-winded ever after!”

“And I told you that I would never again mention the least desire before you. You have the character of that Spanish noble who prayed his mistress not to gaze at the stars, since he could not give them to her.”

“If you looked at one,” replied the count, “I should try to climb to heaven and ask it of God.”

While listening to her husband the countess smoothed a refractory mesh of her hair which scintillated like a flame in a ray of gold. The motion had disarranged her sleeve, and uncovered her beautiful arm encircled at the wrist by the turquoise-studded lizard which she wore on the day of her apparition in the Cascine so fatal to Octave.

“What a fright that poor little lizard once gave you!” said the count. “It was

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when you had, on my insistent prayer, descended to the garden for the first time, and I killed it with the stroke of a switch. I had it dipped in gold and decorated with a few stones; but even as a trinket it still appeared disagreeable to you, and it was some time before you could bring yourself to wear it."

"Oh, I am quite accustomed to it now, and it is my favorite ornament, for it recalls a very dear remembrance."

"Yes," replied the count, "on that day we agreed that on the morrow I should make your aunt an official request for your hand."

The countess recognized the look and tone of the real Olaf, and reassured also by these intimate details, she rose smiling, took his arm, and made several turns about the conservatory with him, plucking with free hand as she went some flowers whose petals she pulled off with her fresh lips, looking as she did so like that Venus of Schiavoni's who is feasting on roses.

"As you have such a good memory to-day," she said, flinging from her the flower she had been mutilating with her pearly

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teeth, "you ought to have recovered the use of your mother-tongue . . . which yesterday you no longer knew."

"If souls retain a human language in paradise," answered the count in Polish, "it is the one my soul will speak in heaven to tell you that I love you."

Prascovie, still moving, let her head fall gently on Olaf's shoulder.

"Dear heart," she murmured, "now you are as I love you to be. Yesterday you frightened me, and I fled as from a stranger."

The next day Octave de Saville, animated by the spirit of the old physician, received a black-edged letter which begged him to assist at the funeral service and burial of M. Balthazar Cherbonneau.

Clothed in his new aspect, the physician followed his former body to, the cemetery, saw himself buried, listened with a well-assumed air of regret to the address pronounced over his grave, in which the irreparable loss to science was deplored, and then returned to the Rue Saint Lazare and awaited the opening of the will he had made in his own favor.

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That day could be read among the items of the evening papers:

“Dr. Balthazar Cherbonneau, known by his long sojourn in India, his philological knowledge, and his marvelous cures, was yesterday found dead in his laboratory. A most thorough examination of the body has banished all idea of a crime. M. Cherbonneau probably succumbed to excessive mental fatigue, or perished in some audacious experiment. It is said that a will in the testator’s own handwriting leaves to the Mazarin library some extremely valuable manuscripts, and names as heir a young man belonging to a distinguished family, M. O. de S.”



# CLARIMONDE





## CLARIMONDE \*

BROTHER, you ask me if I have ever loved. Yes. My story is a strange and terrible one; and though I am sixty-six years of age, I scarcely dare even now to disturb the ashes of that memory. To you I can refuse nothing; but I should not relate such a tale to any less experienced mind. So strange were the circumstances of my story, that I can scarcely believe myself to have ever actually been a party to them. For more than three years I remained the victim of a most singular and diabolical illusion. Poor country priest though I was, I led every night in a dream—would to God it had been all a dream!—a most worldly life, a damning life, a life of a Sardanapalus. One single look too freely cast upon a woman well-nigh caused me to lose my soul; but finally by

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\* "*La Morte Amoureuse.*"

## *Clarimonde*

the grace of God and the assistance of my patron saint, I succeeded in casting out the evil spirit that possessed me. My daily life was long interwoven with a nocturnal life of a totally different character. By day I was a priest of the Lord, occupied with prayer and sacred things; by night, from the instant that I closed my eyes I became a young nobleman, a fine connoisseur in women, dogs, and horses; gambling, drinking, and blaspheming; and when I awoke at early daybreak, it seemed to me, on the other hand, that I had been sleeping, and had only dreamed that I was a priest. Of this somnambulistic life there now remains to me only the recollection of certain scenes and words which I cannot banish from my memory; but although I never actually left the walls of my presbytery, one would think to hear me speak that I were a man who, weary of all worldly pleasures, had become a religious, seeking to end a tempestuous life in the service of God, rather than an humble seminarist who has grown old in this

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obscure curacy, situated in the depths of the woods and even isolated from the life of the century.

Yes, I have loved as none in the world ever loved—with an insensate and furious passion—so violent that I am astonished it did not cause my heart to burst asunder. Ah, what nights—what nights!

From my earliest childhood I had felt a vocation to the priesthood, so that all my studies were directed with that idea in view. Up to the age of twenty-four my life had been only a prolonged novitiate. Having completed my course of theology, I successively received all the minor orders, and my superiors judged me worthy, despite my youth, to pass the last awful degree. My ordination was fixed for Easter week.

I had never gone into the world. My world was confined by the walls of the college and the seminary. I knew in a vague sort of a way that there was something called Woman, but I never permitted my thoughts to dwell on such a subject, and I lived in a

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state of perfect innocence. Twice a year only I saw my infirm and aged mother, and in those visits were comprised my sole relations with the outer world.

I regretted nothing; I felt not the least hesitation at taking the last irrevocable step; I was filled with joy and impatience. Never did a betrothed lover count the slow hours with more feverish ardor; I slept only to dream that I was saying mass; I believed there could be nothing in the world more delightful than to be a priest; I would have refused to be a king or a poet in preference. My ambition could conceive of no loftier aim.

I tell you this in order to show you that what happened to me could not have happened in the natural order of things, and to enable you to understand that I was the victim of an inexplicable fascination.

At last the great day came. I walked to the church with a step so light that I fancied myself sustained in air, or that I had wings upon my shoulders. I believed my-

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self an angel, and wondered at the sombre and thoughtful faces of my companions, for there were several of us. I had passed all the night in prayer, and was in a condition well-nigh bordering on ecstasy. The bishop, a venerable old man, seemed to me God the Father leaning over his Eternity, and I beheld Heaven through the vault of the temple.

You well know the details of that ceremony—the benediction, the communion under both forms, the anointing of the palms of the hands with the Oil of Catechumens, and then the holy sacrifice offered in concert with the bishop.

Ah, truly spake Job when he declared that the imprudent man is one who hath not made a covenant with his eyes! I accidentally lifted my head, which until then I had kept down, and beheld before me, so close that it seemed that I could have touched her—although she was actually a considerable distance from me and on the further side of the sanctuary railing—a young

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woman of extraordinary beauty, and attired with royal magnificence. It seemed as though scales had suddenly fallen from my eyes. I felt like a blind man who unexpectedly recovers his sight. The bishop, so radiantly glorious but an instant before, suddenly vanished away, the tapers paled upon their golden candlesticks like stars in the dawn, and a vast darkness seemed to fill the whole church. The charming creature appeared in bright relief against the background of that darkness, like some angelic revelation. She seemed herself radiant, and radiating light rather than receiving it.

I lowered my eyelids, firmly resolved not to again open them, that I might not be influenced by external objects, for distraction had gradually taken possession of me until I hardly knew what I was doing.

In another minute, nevertheless, I reopened my eyes, for through my eyelashes I still beheld her, all sparkling with prismatic colors, and surrounded with such a

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purple penumbra as one beholds in gazing at the sun.

Oh, how beautiful she was! The greatest painters, who followed ideal beauty into heaven itself, and thence brought back to earth the true portrait of the Madonna, never in their delineations even approached that wildly beautiful reality which I saw before me. Neither the verses of the poet nor the palette of the artist could convey any conception of her. She was rather tall, with a form and bearing of a goddess. Her hair, of a soft blonde hue, was parted in the midst and flowed back over her temples in two rivers of rippling gold; she seemed a diademed queen. Her forehead, bluish-white in its transparency, extended its calm breadth above the arches of her eyebrows, which by a strange singularity were almost black, and admirably relieved the effect of sea-green eyes of unsustainable vivacity and brilliancy. What eyes! With a single flash they could have decided a man's destiny. They had a life, a limpidity, an ardor, a hu-



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mid light which I have never seen in human eyes; they shot forth rays like arrows, which I could distinctly see enter my heart. I know not if the fire which illumined them came from heaven or from hell, but assuredly it came from one or the other. That woman was either an angel or a demon, perhaps both. Assuredly she never sprang from the flank of Eve, our common mother. Teeth of the most lustrous pearl gleamed in her ruddy smile, and at every inflection of her lips little dimples appeared in the satiny rose of her adorable cheeks. There was a delicacy and pride in the regal outline of her nostrils bespeaking noble blood. Agate gleams played over the smooth lustrous skin of her half-bare shoulders, and strings of great blonde pearls—almost equal to her neck in beauty of color—descended upon her bosom. From time to time she elevated her head with the undulating grace of a startled serpent or peacock, thereby imparting a quivering motion to the high lace ruff which surrounded it like a silver trellis-work.

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She wore a robe of orange-red velvet, and from her wide ermine-lined sleeves there peeped forth patrician hands of infinite delicacy, and so ideally transparent that, like the fingers of Aurora, they permitted the light to shine through them.

All these details I can recollect at this moment as plainly as though they were of yesterday, for notwithstanding I was greatly troubled at the time, nothing escaped me; the faintest touch of shading, the little dark speck at the point of the chin, the imperceptible down at the corners of the lips, the velvety floss upon the brow, the quivering shadows of the eyelashes upon the cheeks—I could notice everything with astonishing lucidity of perception.

And gazing, I felt opening within me gates that had until then remained closed; vents long obstructed became all clear, permitting glimpses of unfamiliar perspectives within; life suddenly made itself visible to me under a totally novel aspect. I felt as though I had just been born into a new world and a

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new order of things. A frightful anguish commenced to torture my heart as with red-hot pincers. Every successive minute seemed to me at once but a second and yet a century. Meanwhile the ceremony was proceeding, and I shortly found myself transported far from that world of which my newly born desires were furiously besieging the entrance. Nevertheless I answered "Yes" when I wished to say "No," though all within me protested against the violence done to my soul by my tongue. Some occult power seemed to force the words from my throat against my will. Thus it is, perhaps, that so many young girls walk to the altar firmly resolved to refuse in a startling manner the husband imposed upon them, and that yet not one ever fulfils her intention. Thus it is, doubtless, that so many poor novices take the veil, though they have resolved to tear it into shreds at the moment when called upon to utter the vows. One dares not thus cause so great a scandal to all present, nor deceive the expectation of so many people.

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All those eyes, all those wills seem to weigh down upon you like a cope of lead; and, moreover, measures have been so well taken, everything has been so thoroughly arranged beforehand and after a fashion so evidently irrevocable, that the will yields to the weight of circumstances and utterly breaks down.

As the ceremony proceeded the features of the fair unknown changed their expression. Her look had at first been one of caressing tenderness; it changed to an air of disdain and of mortification, as though at not having been able to make itself understood.

With an effort of will sufficient to have uprooted a mountain, I strove to cry out that I would not be a priest, but I could not speak; my tongue seemed nailed to my palate, and I found it impossible to express my will by the least syllable of negation. Though fully awake, I felt like one under the influence of a nightmare, who vainly strives to shriek out the one word upon which life depends.

She seemed conscious of the martyrdom I

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was undergoing, and, as though to encourage me, she gave me a look replete with divinest promise. Her eyes were a poem; their every glance was a song.

She said to me:

“If thou wilt be mine, I shall make thee happier than God Himself in His paradise. The angels themselves will be jealous of thee. Tear off that funeral shroud in which thou art about to wrap thyself. I am Beauty, I am Youth, I am Life. Come to me! Together we shall be Love. Can Jehovah offer thee aught in exchange? Our lives will flow on like a dream, in one eternal kiss.

“Fling forth the wine of that chalice, and thou art free. I will conduct thee to the Unknown Isles. Thou shalt sleep in my bosom upon a bed of massy gold under a silver pavilion, for I love thee and would take thee away from thy God, before whom so many noble hearts pour forth floods of love which never reach even the steps of His throne!”

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These words seemed to float to my ears in a rhythm of infinite sweetness, for her look was actually sonorous, and the utterances of her eyes were reëchoed in the depths of my heart as though living lips had breathed them into my life. I felt myself willing to renounce God, and yet my tongue mechanically fulfilled all the formalities of the ceremony. The fair one gave me another look, so beseeching, so despairing that keen blades seemed to pierce my heart, and I felt my bosom transfixed by more swords than those of Our Lady of Sorrows.

All was consummated: I had become a priest.

Never was deeper anguish painted on human face than upon hers. The maiden who beholds her affianced lover suddenly fall dead at her side, the mother bending over the empty cradle of her child, Eve seated at the threshold of the gate of Paradise, the miser who finds a stone substituted for his stolen treasure, the poet who accidentally permits the only manuscript of his

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finest work to fall into the fire, could not wear a look so despairing, so inconsolable. All the blood had abandoned her charming face, leaving it whiter, than marble; her beautiful arms hung lifelessly on either side of her body as though their muscles had suddenly relaxed, and she sought the support of a pillar, for her yielding limbs almost betrayed her. As for myself, I staggered toward the door of the church, livid as death, my forehead bathed with a sweat bloodier than that of Calvary; I felt as though I were being strangled; the vault seemed to have flattened down upon my shoulders, and it seemed to me that my head alone sustained the whole weight of the dome.

As I was about to cross the threshold a hand suddenly caught mine—a woman's hand! I had never till then touched the hand of any woman. It was cold as a serpent's skin, and yet its impress remained upon my wrist, burnt there as though branded by a glowing iron. It was she.

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“Unhappy man! Unhappy man! What hast thou done?” she exclaimed in a low voice, and immediately disappeared in the crowd.

The aged bishop passed by. He cast a severe and scrutinizing look upon me. My face presented the wildest aspect imaginable; I blushed and turned pale alternately; dazzling lights flashed before my eyes. A companion took pity on me. He seized my arm and led me out. I could not possibly have found my way back to the seminary unassisted. At the corner of a street, while the young priest's attention was momentarily turned in another direction, a negro page, fantastically garbed, approached me, and without pausing on his way slipped into my hand a little pocket-book with gold-embroidered corners, at the same time giving me a sign to hide it. I concealed it in my sleeve, and there kept it until I found myself alone in my cell. Then I opened the clasp. There were only two leaves within, bearing the words, “Clarimonde. At the



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Concini Palace." So little acquainted was I at that time with the things of this world that I had never heard of Clarimonde, celebrated as she was, and I had no idea as to where the Concini Palace was situated. I hazarded a thousand conjectures, each more extravagant than the last; but, in truth, I cared little whether she were a great lady or a courtesan, so that I could but see her once more.

My love, although the growth of a single hour, had taken imperishable root. I did not even dream of attempting to tear it up, so fully was I convinced such a thing would be impossible. That woman had completely taken possession of me. One look from her had sufficed to change my very nature. She had breathed her will into my life, and I no longer lived in myself, but in her and for her. I gave myself up to a thousand extravagancies. I kissed the place upon my hand which she had touched, and I repeated her name over and over again for hours in succession. I only needed to close my eyes

## *Clarimonde*

in order to see her distinctly as though she were actually present; and I reiterated to myself the words she had uttered in my ear at the church porch: "Unhappy man! Unhappy man! What hast thou done?" I comprehended at last the full horror of my situation, and the funereal and awful restraints of the state into which I had just entered became clearly revealed to me. To be a priest!—that is, to be chaste, to never love, to observe no distinction of sex or age, to turn from the sight of all beauty, to put out one's own eyes, to hide forever crouching in the chill shadows of some church or cloister, to visit none but the dying, to watch by unknown corpses, and ever bear about with one the black soutane as a garb of mourning for one's self, so that your very dress might serve as a pall for your coffin.

And I felt life rising within me like a subterranean lake, expanding and overflowing; my blood leaped fiercely through my arteries; my long-restrained youth suddenly burst into active being, like the aloe which

## *Clarimonde*

blooms but once in a hundred years, and then bursts into blossom with a clap of thunder.

What could I do in order to see Clarimonde once more? I had no pretext to offer for desiring to leave the seminary, not knowing any person in the city. I would not even be able to remain there but a short time, and was only waiting my assignment to the curacy which I must thereafter occupy. I tried to remove the bars of the window; but it was at a fearful height from the ground, and I found that as I had no ladder it would be useless to think of escaping thus. And, furthermore, I could descend thence only by night in any event, and afterward how should I be able to find my way through the inextricable labyrinth of streets? All these difficulties, which to many would have appeared altogether insignificant, were gigantic to me, a poor seminarist who had fallen in love only the day before for the first time, without experience, without money, without attire.

## *Clarimonde*

“ Ah ! ” cried I to myself in my blindness, “ were I not a priest I could have seen her every day ; I might have been her lover, her spouse. Instead of being wrapped in this dismal shroud of mine I would have had garments of silk and velvet, golden chains, a sword, and fair plumes like other handsome young cavaliers. My hair, instead of being dishonored by the tonsure, would flow down upon my neck in waving curls ; I would have a fine waxed mustache ; I would be a gallant.” But one hour passed before an altar, a few hastily articulated words, had forever cut me off from the number of the living, and I had myself sealed down the stone of my own tomb ; I had with my own hand bolted the gate of my prison !

I went to the window. The sky was beautifully blue ; the trees had donned their spring robes ; nature seemed to be making parade of an ironical joy. The *Place* was filled with people, some going, others coming ; young beaux and young beauties were sauntering in couples toward the groves and

## *Clarimonde*

gardens; merry youths passed by, cheerily trolling refrains of drinking songs—it was all a picture of vivacity, life, animation, gayety, which formed a bitter contrast with my mourning and my solitude. On the steps of the gate sat a young mother playing with her child. She kissed its little rosy mouth still impearled with drops of milk, and performed, in order to amuse it, a thousand divine little puerilities such as only mothers know how to invent. The father standing at a little distance smiled gently upon the charming group, and with folded arms seemed to hug his joy to his heart. I could not endure that spectacle. I closed the window with violence, and flung myself on my bed, my heart filled with frightful hate and jealousy, and gnawed my fingers and my bedcovers like a tiger that has passed ten days without food.

I know not how long I remained in this condition, but at last, while writhing on the bed in a fit of spasmodic fury, I suddenly perceived the Abbé Sérapion, who was stand-

## *Clarimonde*

ing erect in the centre of the room, watching me attentively. Filled with shame of myself, I let my head fall upon my breast and covered my face with my hands.

“Romuald, my friend, something very extraordinary is transpiring within you,” observed S erapion, after a few moments’ silence; “your conduct is altogether inexplicable. You—always so quiet, so pious, so gentle—you to rage in your cell like a wild beast! Take heed, brother—do not listen to the suggestions of the devil. The Evil Spirit, furious that you have consecrated yourself forever to the Lord, is prowling around you like a ravening wolf and making a last effort to obtain possession of you. Instead of allowing yourself to be conquered, my dear Romuald, make to yourself a cuirass of prayers, a buckler of mortifications, and combat the enemy like a valiant man; you will then assuredly overcome him. Virtue must be proved by temptation, and gold comes forth purer from the hands of the assayer. Fear not.

## *Clarimonde*

Never allow yourself to become discouraged. The most watchful and steadfast souls are at moments liable to such temptation. Pray, fast, meditate, and the Evil Spirit will depart from you."

The words of the Abbé Sérapion restored me to myself, and I became a little more calm. "I came," he continued, "to tell you that you have been appointed to the curacy of C——. The priest who had charge of it has just died, and Monseigneur the Bishop has ordered me to have you installed there at once. Be ready, therefore, to start to-morrow." I responded with an inclination of the head, and the Abbé retired. I opened my missal and commenced reading some prayers, but the letters became confused and blurred under my eyes, the thread of the ideas entangled itself hopelessly in my brain, and the volume at last fell from my hands without my being aware of it.

To leave to-morrow without having been able to see her again, to add yet another

## *Clarimonde*

barrier to the many already interposed between us, to lose forever all hope of being able to meet her, except, indeed, through a miracle! Even to write her, alas! would be impossible, for by whom could I despatch my letter? With my sacred character of priest, to whom could I dare unbosom myself, in whom could I confide? I became a prey to the bitterest anxiety.

Then suddenly recurred to me the words of the Abbé Sérapion regarding the artifices of the devil; and the strange character of the adventure, the supernatural beauty of Clarimonde, the phosphoric light of her eyes, the burning imprint of her hand, the agony into which she had thrown me, the sudden change wrought within me when all my piety vanished in a single instant—these and other things clearly testified to the work of the Evil One, and perhaps that satiny hand was but the glove which concealed his claws. Filled with terror at these fancies, I again picked up the missal which had slipped from my knees and fallen upon the



## *Clarimonde*

floor, and once more gave myself up to prayer.

Next morning Sérapiou came to take me away. Two mules freighted with our miserable valises awaited us at the gate. He mounted one, and I the other as well as I knew how.

As we passed along the streets of the city, I gazed attentively at all the windows and balconies in the hope of seeing Clarimonde, but it was yet early in the morning, and the city had hardly opened its eyes. Mine sought to penetrate the blinds and window-curtains of all the palaces before which we were passing. Sérapiou doubtless attributed this curiosity to my admiration of the architecture, for he slackened the pace of his animal in order to give me time to look around me. At last we passed the city gates and commenced to mount the hill beyond. When we arrived at its summit I turned to take a last look at the place where Clarimonde dwelt. The shadow of a great cloud hung over all the city ; the contrasting col-

## *Clarimonde*

ors of its blue and red roofs were lost in the uniform half-tint, through which here and there floated upward, like white flakes of foam, the smoke of freshly kindled fires. By a singular optical effect one edifice, which surpassed in height all the neighboring buildings that were still dimly veiled by the vapors, towered up, fair and lustrous with the gilding of a solitary beam of sunlight—although actually more than a league away it seemed quite near. The smallest details of its architecture were plainly distinguishable—the turrets, the platforms, the window-casements, and even the swallow-tailed weather-vanes.

“What is that palace I see over there, all lighted up by the sun?” I asked Sérapion. He shaded his eyes with his hand, and having looked in the direction indicated, replied: “It is the ancient palace which the Prince Concini has given to the courtesan Clarimonde. Awful things are done there!”

At that instant, I know not yet whether

## *Clarimonde*

it was a reality or an illusion, I fancied I saw gliding along the terrace a shapely white figure, which gleamed for a moment in passing and as quickly vanished. It was Clarimonde.

Oh, did she know that at that very hour, all feverish and restless—from the height of the rugged road which separated me from her and which, alas ! I could never more descend—I was directing my eyes upon the palace where she dwelt, and which a mocking beam of sunlight seemed to bring nigh to me, as though inviting me to enter therein as its lord ? Undoubtedly she must have known it, for her soul was too sympathetically united with mine not to have felt its least emotional thrill, and that subtle sympathy it must have been which prompted her to climb—although clad only in her night-dress—to the summit of the terrace, amid the icy dews of the morning.

The shadow gained the palace, and the scene became to the eye only a motionless ocean of roofs and gables, amid which one

## *Clarimonde*

mountainous undulation was distinctly visible. Sérapion urged his mule forward, my own at once followed at the same gait, and a sharp angle in the road at last hid the city of S—— forever from my eyes, as I was destined never to return thither. At the close of a weary three-days' journey through dismal country fields, we caught sight of the cock upon the steeple of the church which I was to take charge of, peeping above the trees, and after having followed some winding roads fringed with thatched cottages and little gardens, we found ourselves in front of the façade, which certainly possessed few features of magnificence. A porch ornamented with some mouldings, and two or three pillars rudely hewn from sandstone; a tiled roof with counterforts of the same sandstone as the pillars—that was all. To the left lay the cemetery overgrown with high weeds, and having a great iron cross rising up in its centre; to the right stood the presbytery, under the shadow of the church. It was a house of the most extreme

## *Clarimonde*

simplicity **and** frigid cleanliness. We entered **the** enclosure. A few chickens were **picking** up some oats scattered upon the ground; accustomed, seemingly, to the black habit of ecclesiastics, they showed no fear of our presence and scarcely troubled themselves to get out of our way. A hoarse, wheezy barking fell upon our ears, and we saw an aged dog running toward us.

It was my predecessor's dog. He had dull bleared eyes, grizzled hair, and every mark of the greatest age to which a dog can possibly attain. I patted him gently, and he proceeded at once to march along beside me with an air of satisfaction unspeakable. A very old woman, who had been the housekeeper of the former curé, also came to meet us, and after having invited<sup>o</sup> me into a little back parlor, asked whether I intended to retain her. I replied that I would take care of her, and the dog, and the chickens, and all the furniture her master had bequeathed her at his death. At this she became fairly transported with joy, and the Abbé Sérapiou

## *Clarimonde*

at once paid her the price which she asked for her little property.

As soon as my installation was over, the Abbé Sécrapion returned to the seminary. I was, therefore, left alone, with no one but myself to look to for aid or counsel. The thought of Clarimonde again began to haunt me, and in spite of all my endeavors to banish it, I always found it present **in my** meditations. One **evening while** promenading in my little garden along the walks bordered with box-plants, I fancied that I saw through the elm-trees the figure of a woman, who followed my every movement, and that I beheld two sea-green eyes gleaming through the foliage; but it was only an illusion, and on going round to the other side of the garden, I could find nothing except a footprint on the sanded walk—a footprint so small that it seemed to have been made by the foot of a child. The garden was enclosed by very high walls. I searched every nook and corner of it, but could discover no one there. I have never succeeded

## *Clarimonde*

in fully accounting for this circumstance, which, after all, was nothing compared with the strange things which happened to me afterward.

For a whole year I lived thus, filling all the duties of my calling with the most scrupulous exactitude, praying and fasting, exhorting and lending ghostly aid to the sick, and bestowing alms even to the extent of frequently depriving myself of the very necessities of life. But I felt a great aridness within me, and the sources of grace seemed closed against me. I never found that happiness which should spring from the fulfilment of a holy mission: my thoughts were far away, and the words of Clarimonde were ever upon my lips like an involuntary refrain. Oh, brother, meditaté well on this! Through having but once lifted my eyes to look upon a woman, through one fault apparently so venial, I have for years remained a victim to the most miserable agonies, and the happiness of my life has been destroyed forever.

## *Clarimonde*

I will not longer dwell upon those defeats, or on those inward victories invariably followed by yet more terrible falls, but will at once proceed to the facts of my story. One night my door-bell was long and violently rung. The aged housekeeper arose and opened to the stranger, and the figure of a man, whose complexion was deeply bronzed, and who was richly clad in a foreign costume, with a poniard at his girdle, appeared under the rays of Barbara's lantern. Her first impulse was one of terror, but the stranger reassured her, and stated that he desired to see me at once on matters relating to my holy calling. Barbara invited him upstairs, where I was on the point of retiring. The stranger told me that his mistress, a very noble lady, was lying at the point of death, and desired to see a priest. I replied that I was prepared to follow him, took with me the sacred articles necessary for extreme unction, and descended in all haste. Two horses black as the night itself stood without the gate, pawing the ground with im-



## *Clarimonde*

patience, and veiling their chests with long streams of smoky vapor exhaled from their nostrils. He held the stirrup and aided me to mount upon one; then, merely laying his hand upon the pommel of the saddle, he vaulted on the other, pressed the animal's sides with his knees, and loosened rein. The horse bounded forward with the velocity of an arrow. Mine, of which the stranger held the bridle, also started off at a swift gallop, keeping up with his companion. We devoured the road. The ground flowed backward beneath us in a long streaked line of pale gray, and the black silhouettes of the trees seemed fleeing by us on either side like an army in rout. We passed through a forest so profoundly gloomy that I felt my flesh creep in the chill darkness with superstitious fear. The showers of bright sparks which flew from the stony road under the ironshod feet of our horses remained glowing in our wake like a fiery trail; and had any one at that hour of the night beheld us both—my guide and myself—he must have taken us

## *Clarimonde*

for two spectres riding upon nightmares. Witch-fires ever and anon flitted across the road before us, and the night-birds shrieked fearsomely in the depth of the woods beyond, where we beheld at intervals glow the phosphorescent eyes of wildcats. The manes of the horses became more and more dishevelled, the sweat streamed over their flanks, and their breath came through their nostrils hard and fast. But when he found them slacking pace, the guide reanimated them by uttering a strange, guttural, unearthly cry, and the gallop recommenced with fury. At last the whirlwind race ceased; a huge black mass pierced through with many bright points of light suddenly rose before us, the hoofs of our horses echoed louder upon a strong wooden draw-bridge, and we rode under a great vaulted archway which darkly yawned between two enormous towers. Some great excitement evidently reigned in the castle. Servants with torches were crossing the courtyard in every direction, and above, lights were as-

## *Clarimonde*

ending and descending from landing to landing. I obtained a confused glimpse of vast masses of architecture—columns, arcades, flights of steps, stairways—a royal voluptuousness and elfin magnificence of construction worthy of fairyland. A negro page—the same who had before brought me the tablet from Clarimonde, and whom I instantly recognized—approached to aid me in dismounting, and the major-domo, attired in black velvet with a gold chain about his neck, advanced to meet me, supporting himself upon an ivory cane. Large tears were falling from his eyes and streaming over his cheeks and white beard. “Too late!” he cried, sorrowfully shaking his venerable head. “Too late, sir priest! But if you have not been able to save the soul, come at least and watch by the poor body.”

He took my arm and conducted me to the death chamber. I wept not less bitterly than he, for I had learned that the dead one was none other than that Clarimonde whom I had so deeply and so wildly loved. A

## *Clarimonde*

*prie-dieu* stood at the foot of the bed ; a bluish flame flickering in a bronze patera filled all the room with a wan, deceptive light, here and there bringing out in the darkness at intervals some projection of furniture or cornice. In a chiselled urn upon the table there was a faded white rose, whose leaves—excepting one that still held—had all fallen, like odorous tears, to the foot of the vase. A broken black mask, a fan, and disguises of every variety, which were lying on the arm-chairs, bore witness that death had entered suddenly and unannounced into that sumptuous dwelling. Without daring to cast my eyes upon the bed, I knelt down and commenced to repeat the Psalms for the Dead, with exceeding fervor, thanking God that he had placed the tomb between me and the memory of this woman, so that I might thereafter be able to utter her name in my prayers as a name forever sanctified by death. But my fervor gradually weakened, and I fell insensibly into a reverie. That chamber

## *Clarimonde*

bore no semblance to a chamber of death. In lieu of the foetid and cadaverous odors which I had been accustomed to breathe during such funereal vigils, a languorous vapor of Oriental perfume—I know not what amorous odor of woman—softly floated through the tepid air. That pale light seemed rather a twilight gloom contrived for voluptuous pleasure than a substitute for the yellow-flickering watch-tapers which shine by the side of corpses. I thought upon the strange destiny which enabled me to meet Clarimonde again at the very moment when she was lost to me forever, and a sigh of regretful anguish escaped from my breast. Then it seemed to me that some one behind me had also sighed, and I turned round to look. It was only an echo. But in that moment my eyes fell upon the bed of death which they had till then avoided. The red damask curtains, decorated with large flowers worked in embroidery, and looped up with gold bullion, permitted me to behold the fair dead, lying at full length,

## *Clarimonde*

with hands joined upon her bosom. She was covered with a linen wrapping of dazzling whiteness, which formed a strong contrast with the gloomy purple of the hangings, and was of so fine a texture that it concealed nothing of her body's charming form, and allowed the eye to follow those beautiful outlines—undulating like the neck of a swan—which even death had not robbed of their supple grace. She seemed an alabaster statue executed by some skilful sculptor to place upon the tomb of a queen, or rather, perhaps, like a slumbering maiden over whom the silent snow had woven a spotless veil.

I could no longer maintain my constrained attitude of prayer. The air of the alcove intoxicated me, that febrile perfume of half-faded roses penetrated my very brain, and I commenced to pace restlessly up and down the chamber, pausing at each turn before the bier to contemplate the graceful corpse lying beneath the transparency of its shroud. Wild fancies came thronging to my brain.

## *Clarimonde*

I thought to myself that she might not, perhaps, be really dead; that she might only have feigned death for the purpose of bringing me to her castle, and then declaring her love. At one time I even thought I saw her foot move under the whiteness of the coverings, and slightly disarrange the long, straight folds of the winding-sheet.

And then I asked myself: "Is this indeed Clarimonde? What proof have I that it is she? Might not that black page have passed into the service of some other lady? Surely, I must be going mad to torture and afflict myself thus!" But my heart answered with a fierce throbbing: "It is she; it is she indeed!" I approached the bed again, and fixed my eyes with redoubled attention upon the object of my incertitude. Ah, must I confess it? That exquisite perfection of bodily form, although purified and made sacred by the shadow of death, affected me more voluptuously than it should have done, and that repose so closely resembled slumber that one might well have mistaken it for

## *Clarimonde*

such. I forgot that I had come there to perform a funeral ceremony; I fancied myself a young bridegroom entering the chamber of the bride, who all modestly hides her fair face, and through coyness seeks to keep herself wholly veiled. Heartbroken with grief, yet wild with hope, shuddering at once with fear and pleasure, I bent over her and grasped the corner of the sheet. I lifted it back, holding my breath all the while through fear of waking her. My arteries throbbed with such violence that I felt them hiss through my temples, and the sweat poured from my forehead in streams, as though I had lifted a mighty slab of marble. There, indeed, lay Clarimonde, even as I had seen her at the church on the day of my ordination. She was not less charming than then. With her, death seemed but a last coquetry. The pallor of her cheeks, the less brilliant carnation of her lips, her long eyelashes lowered and relieving their dark fringe against that white skin, lent her an unspeakably seductive aspect of melancholy



## *Clarimonde*

chastity and mental suffering; her long loose hair, still intertwined with some little blue flowers, made a shining pillow for her head, and veiled the nudity of her shoulders with its thick ringlets; her beautiful hands, purer, more diaphanous than the Host, were crossed on her bosom in an attitude of pious rest and silent prayer, which served to counteract all that might have proven otherwise too alluring—even after death—in the exquisite roundness and ivory polish of her bare arms from which the pearl bracelets had not yet been removed. I remained long in mute contemplation, and the more I gazed, the less could I persuade myself that life had really abandoned that beautiful body forever. I do not know whether it was an illusion or a reflection of the lamplight, but it seemed to me that the blood was again commencing to circulate under that lifeless pallor, although she remained all motionless. I laid my hand lightly on her arm; it was cold, but not colder than her hand on the day when it touched mine at the portals of

## *Clarimonde*

the church. I resumed my position, bending my face above her, and bathing her cheeks with the warm dew of my tears. Ah, what bitter feelings of despair and helplessness, what agonies unutterable did I endure in that long watch! Vainly did I wish that I could have gathered all my life into one mass that I might give it all to her, and breathe into her chill remains the flame which devoured me. The night advanced, and feeling the moment of eternal separation approach, I could not deny myself the last sad sweet pleasure of imprinting a kiss upon the dead lips of her who had been my only love. . . . Oh, miracle! A faint breath mingled itself with my breath, and the mouth of Clarimonde responded to the passionate pressure of mine. Her eyes unclosed, and lighted up with something of their former brilliancy; she uttered a long sigh, and uncrossing her arms, passed them around my neck with a look of ineffable delight. "Ah, it is thou, Romuald!" she murmured in a voice languishingly sweet

## *Clarimonde*

as the last vibrations of a harp. "What ailed thee, dearest? I waited so long for thee that I am dead; but we are now betrothed; I can see thee and visit thee. Adieu, Romuald, adieu! I love thee. That is all I wished to tell thee, and I give thee back the life which thy kiss for a moment recalled. We shall soon meet again."

Her head fell back, but her arms yet encircled me, as though to retain me still. A furious whirlwind suddenly burst in the window, and entered the chamber. The last remaining leaf of the white rose for a moment palpitated at the extremity of the stalk like a butterfly's wing, then it detached itself and flew forth through the open casement, bearing with it the soul of Clarimonde. The lamp was extinguished, and I fell insensible upon the bosom of the beautiful dead.

When I came to myself again I was lying on the bed in my little room at the presbytery, and the old dog of the former curé was licking my hand which had been hanging down outside of the covers. Barbara, all

## *Clarimonde*

trembling with age and anxiety, was busying herself about the room, opening and shutting drawers, and emptying powders into glasses. On seeing me open my eyes, the old woman uttered a cry of joy, the dog yelped and wagged his tail, but I was still so weak that I could not speak a single word or make the slightest motion. Afterward I learned that I had lain thus for three days, giving no evidence of life beyond the faintest respiration. Those three days do not reckon in my life, nor could I ever imagine whither my spirit had departed during those three days ; I have no recollection of aught relating to them. Barbara told me that the same coppery-complexioned man who came to seek me on the night of my departure from the presbytery, had brought me back the next morning in a close litter, and departed immediately afterward. When I became able to collect my scattered thoughts, I reviewed within my mind all the circumstances of that fateful night. At first I thought I had been the victim of some magi-

## *Clarimonde*

cal illusion, but ere long the recollection of other circumstances, real and palpable in themselves, came to forbid that supposition. I could not believe that I had been dreaming, since Barbara as well as myself had seen the strange man with his two black horses, and described with exactness every detail of his figure and apparel. Nevertheless it appeared that none knew of any castle in the neighborhood answering to the description of that in which I had again found Clarimonde.

One morning I found the Abbé Sérapion in my room. Barbara had advised him that I was ill, and he had come with all speed to see me. Although this haste on his part testified to an affectionate interest in me, yet his visit did not cause me the pleasure which it should have done. The Abbé Sérapion had something penetrating and inquisitorial in his gaze which made me feel very ill at ease. His presence filled me with embarrassment and a sense of guilt. At the first glance he divined my interior trouble, and I hated him for his clairvoyance.

## *Clarimonde*

While he inquired after my health in hypocritically honeyed accents, he constantly kept his two great yellow lion-eyes fixed upon me, and plunged his look into my soul like a sounding lead. Then he asked me how I directed my parish, if I was happy in it, how I passed the leisure hours allowed me in the intervals of pastoral duty, whether I had become acquainted with many of the inhabitants of the place, what was my favorite reading, and a thousand other such questions. I answered these inquiries as briefly as possible, and he, without ever waiting for my answers, passed rapidly from one subject of query to another. That conversation had evidently no connection with what he actually wished to say. At last, without any premonition, but as though repeating a piece of news which he had recalled on the instant, and feared might otherwise be forgotten subsequently, he suddenly said, in a clear vibrant voice, which rang in my ears like the trumpets of the Last Judgment :

## *Clarimonde*

“The great courtesan Clarimonde died a few days ago, at the close of an orgie which lasted eight days and eight nights. It was something infernally splendid. The abominations of the banquets of Belshazzar and Cleopatra were reënacted there. Good God, what age are we living in ? The guests were served by swarthy slaves who spoke an unknown tongue, and who seemed to me to be veritable demons. The livery of the very least among them would have served for the gala-dress of an emperor. There have always been very strange stories told of this Clarimonde, and all her lovers came to a violent or miserable end. They used to say that she was a ghoul, a female vampire ; but I believe she was none other than Beelzebub himself.”

He ceased to speak and commenced to regard me more attentively than ever, as though to observe the effect of his words on me. I could not refrain from starting when I heard him utter the name of Clarimonde, and this news of her death, in addition to

## *Clarimonde*

the pain it caused me by reason of its coincidence with the nocturnal scenes I had witnessed, filled me with an agony and terror which my face betrayed, despite my utmost endeavors to appear composed. Sérapion fixed an anxious and severe look upon me, and then observed: "My son, I must warn you that you are standing with foot raised upon the brink of an abyss; take heed lest you fall therein. Satan's claws are long, and tombs are not always true to their trust. The tombstone of Clarimonde should be sealed down with a triple seal, for, if report be true, it is not the first time she has died. May God watch over you, Romuald!"

And with these words the Abbé walked slowly to the door. I did not see him again at that time, for he left for S—— almost immediately.

I became completely restored to health and resumed my accustomed duties. The memory of Clarimonde and the words of the old Abbé were constantly in my mind;



## *Clarimonde*

nevertheless no extraordinary event had occurred to verify the funereal predictions of Sérapion, and I had commenced to believe that his fears and my own terrors were over-exaggerated, when one night I had a strange dream. I had hardly fallen asleep when I heard my bed-curtains drawn apart, as their rings slid back upon the curtain rod with a sharp sound. I rose up quickly upon my elbow, and beheld the shadow of a woman standing erect before me. I recognized Clarimonde immediately. She bore in her hand a little lamp, shaped like those which are placed in tombs, and its light lent her fingers a rosy transparency, which extended itself by lessening degrees even to the opaque and milky whiteness of her bare arm. Her only garment was the linen winding-sheet which had shrouded her when lying upon the bed of death. She sought to gather its folds over her bosom as though ashamed of being so scantily clad, but her little hand was not equal to the task. She was so white that the color of the drapery blended with

## *Clarimonde*

that of her flesh under the pallid rays of the lamp. Enveloped with this subtle tissue which betrayed all the contours of her body, she seemed rather the marble statue of some fair antique bather than a woman endowed with life. But dead or living, statue or woman, shadow or body, her beauty was still the same, only that the green light of her eyes was less brilliant, and her mouth, once so warmly crimson, was only tinted with a faint tender rosiness, like that of her cheeks. The little blue flowers which I had noticed entwined in her hair were withered and dry, and had lost nearly all their leaves, but this did not prevent her from being charming—so charming that notwithstanding the strange character of the adventure, and the unexplainable manner in which she had entered my room, I felt not even for a moment the least fear.

She placed the lamp on the table and seated herself at the foot of my bed; then bending toward me, she said, in that voice at once silvery clear and yet velvety in its

## *Clarimonde*

sweet softness, such as I never heard from any lips save hers:

“I have kept thee long in waiting, dear Romuald, and it must have seemed to thee that I had forgotten thee. But I come from afar off, very far off, and from a land whence no other has ever yet returned. There is neither sun nor moon in that land whence I come: all is but space and shadow; there is neither road nor pathway: no earth for the foot, no air for the wing; and nevertheless behold me here, for Love is stronger than Death and must conquer him in the end. Oh what sad faces and fearful things I have seen on my way hither! What difficulty my soul, returned to earth through the power of will alone, has had in finding its body and reinstating itself therein! What terrible efforts I had to make ere I could lift the ponderous slab with which they had covered me! See, the palms of my poor hands are all bruised! Kiss them, sweet love, that they may be healed!” She laid the cold palms of her hands upon my

## *Clarimonde*

mouth, one after the other. I kissed them, indeed, many times, and she the while watched me with a smile of ineffable affection.

I confess to my shame that I had entirely forgotten the advice of the Abbé Sérapion and the sacred office wherewith I had been invested. I had fallen without resistance, and at the first assault. I had not even made the least effort to repel the tempter. The fresh coolness of Clarimonde's skin penetrated my own, and I felt voluptuous tremors pass over my whole body. Poor child! in spite of all I saw afterward, I can hardly yet believe she was a demon; at least she had no appearance of being such, and never did Satan so skilfully conceal his claws and horns. She had drawn her feet up beneath her, and squatted down on the edge of the couch in an attitude full of negligent coquetry. From time to time she passed her little hand through my hair and twisted it into curls, as though trying how a new style of wearing it would become my

## *Clarimonde*

face. I abandoned myself to her hands with the most guilty pleasure, while she accompanied her gentle play with the prettiest prattle. The most remarkable fact was that I felt no astonishment whatever at so extraordinary an adventure, and as in dreams one finds no difficulty in accepting the most fantastic events as simple facts, so all these circumstances seemed to me perfectly natural in themselves.

“I loved thee long ere I saw thee, dear Romuald, and sought thee everywhere. Thou wast my dream, and I first saw thee in the church at the fatal moment. I said at once, ‘It is he!’ I gave thee a look into which I threw all the love I ever had, all the love I now have, all the love I shall ever have for thee—a look that would have damned a cardinal or brought a king to his knees at my feet in view of all his court. Thou remainedst unmoved, preferring thy God to me!

“Ah, how jealous I am of that God whom thou didst love and still lovest more than me!

## *Clarimonde*

“Woe is me, unhappy one that I am! I can never have thy heart all to myself, I whom thou didst recall to life with a kiss—dead Clarimonde, who for thy sake bursts asunder the gates of the tomb, and comes to consecrate to thee a life which she has resumed only to make thee happy!”

All her words were accompanied with the most impassioned caresses, which bewildered my sense and my reason to such an extent, that I did not fear to utter a frightful blasphemy for the sake of consoling her, and to declare that I loved her as much as God.

Her eyes rekindled and shone like chryso-prases. “In truth?—in very truth?—as much as God!” she cried, flinging her beautiful arms around me. “Since it is so, thou wilt come with me; thou wilt follow me whithersoever I desire. Thou wilt cast away thy ugly black habit. Thou shalt be the proudest and most envied of cavaliers; thou shalt be my lover! To be the acknowledged lover of Clarimonde, who has refused even a Pope, that will be something to feel proud

## *Clarimonde*

of! Ah, the fair, unspeakably happy existence, the beautiful golden life we shall live together! And when shall we depart, my fair sir?"

"To-morrow! To-morrow!" I cried in my delirium.

"To-morrow, then, so let it be!" she answered. "In the meanwhile I shall have opportunity to change my toilet, for this is a little too light and in nowise suited for a voyage. I must also forthwith notify all my friends who believe me dead, and mourn for me as deeply as they are capable of doing. The money, the dresses, the carriages—all will be ready. I shall call for thee at this same hour. Adieu, dear heart!" And she lightly touched my forehead with her lips. The lamp went out, the curtains closed again, and all became dark; a leaden, dreamless sleep fell on me and held me unconscious until the morning following.

I awoke later than usual, and the recollection of this singular adventure troubled me during the whole day. I finally persuaded

## *Clarimonde*

myself that it was a mere vapor of my heated imagination. Nevertheless its sensations had been so vivid that it was difficult to persuade myself that they were not real, and it was not without some presentiment of what was going to happen that I got into bed at last, after having prayed God to drive far from me all thoughts of evil, and to protect the chastity of my slumber.

I soon fell into a deep sleep, and my dream was continued. The curtains again parted, and I beheld Clarimonde, not as on the former occasion, pale in her pale winding-sheet, with the violets of death upon her cheeks, but gay, sprightly, jaunty, in a superb travelling dress of green velvet, trimmed with gold lace, and looped up on either side to allow a glimpse of satin petticoat. Her blonde hair escaped in thick ringlets from beneath a broad black felt hat, decorated with white feathers whimsically twisted into various shapes. In one hand she held a little riding whip terminated by a golden whistle. She tapped me lightly with



## *Clarimonde*

it, and exclaimed: "Well, my fine sleeper, is this the way you make your preparations? I thought I would find you up and dressed. Arise quickly, we have no time to lose."

I leaped out of bed at once.

"Come, dress yourself, and let us go," she continued, pointing to a little package she had brought with her. "The horses are becoming impatient of delay and champing their bits at the door. We ought to have been by this time at least ten leagues distant from here."

I dressed myself hurriedly, and she handed me the articles of apparel herself one by one, bursting into laughter from time to time at my awkwardness, as she explained to me the use of a garment when I had made a mistake. She hurriedly arranged my hair, and this done, held up before me a little pocket mirror of Venetian crystal, rimmed with silver filigree-work, and playfully asked: "How dost find thyself now? Wilt engage me for thy valet de chambre?"

## *Clarimonde*

I was no longer the same person, and I could not even recognize myself. I resembled my former self no more than a finished statue resembles a block of stone. My old face seemed but a coarse daub of the one reflected in the mirror. I was handsome, and my vanity was sensibly tickled by the metamorphosis. That elegant apparel, that richly embroidered vest had made of me a totally different personage, and I marvelled at the power of transformation owned by a few yards of cloth cut after a certain pattern. The spirit of my costume penetrated my very skin, and within ten minutes more I had become something of a coxcomb.

In order to feel more at ease in my new attire, I took several turns up and down the room. Clarimonde watched me with an air of maternal pleasure, and appeared well satisfied with her work. "Come, enough of this child's-play! Let us start, Romuald, dear. We have far to go, and we may not get there in time." She took my hand and led me forth. All the doors opened before

## *Clarimonde*

her at a touch, and we passed by the dog without awaking him.

At the gate we found Margheritone waiting, the same swarthy groom who had once before been my escort. ' He held the bridles of three horses, all black like those which bore us to the castle—one for me, one for him, one for Clarimonde. Those horses must have been Spanish genets born of mares fecundated by a zephyr, for they were fleet as the wind itself, and the moon, which had just risen at our departure to light us on the way, rolled over the sky like a wheel detached from her own chariot. We beheld her on the right leaping from tree to tree, and putting herself out of breath in the effort to keep up with us. Soon we came upon a level plain where, hard by a clump of trees, a carriage with four vigorous horses awaited us. We entered it, and the postilions urged their animals into a mad gallop. I had one arm around Clarimonde's waist, and one of her hands clasped in mine; her head leaned upon my shoulder, and I felt

## *Clarimonde*

her bosom, half bare, lightly pressing against my arm. I had never known such intense happiness. In that hour I had forgotten everything, and I no more remembered having ever been a priest than I remembered what I had been doing in my mother's womb, so great was the fascination which the evil spirit exerted upon me. From that night my nature seemed in some sort to have become halved, and there were two men within me, neither of whom knew the other. At one moment I believed myself a priest who dreamed nightly that he was a gentleman, at another that I was a gentleman who dreamed he was a priest. I could no longer distinguish the dream from the reality, nor could I discover where the reality began or where ended the dream. The exquisite young lord and libertine railed at the priest, the priest loathed the dissolute habits of the young lord. Two spirals entangled and confounded the one with the other, yet never touching, would afford a fair representation of this bicephalic life

## *Clarimonde*

which I lived. Despite the strange character of my condition, I do not believe that I ever inclined, even for a moment, to madness. I always retained with extreme vividness all the perceptions of my two lives. Only there was one absurd fact which I could not explain to myself—namely, that the consciousness of the same individuality existed in two men so opposite in character. It was an anomaly for which I could not account—whether I believed myself to be the curé of the little village of C——, or *Il Signor Romualdo*, the titled lover of Clarimonde.

Be that as it may, I lived, at least I believed that I lived, in Venice. I have never been able to discover rightly how much of illusion and how much of reality there was in this fantastic adventure. We dwelt in a great palace on the Canaleio, filled with frescoes and statues, and containing two Titians in the noblest style of the great master, which were hung in Clarimonde's chamber. It was a palace well worthy of a king. We

## *Clarimonde*

had each our gondola, our *barcarolli* in family livery, our music hall, and our special poet. Clarimonde always lived upon a magnificent scale; there was something of Cleopatra in her nature. As for me, I had the retinue of a prince's son, and I was regarded with as much reverential respect as though I had been of the family of one of the twelve Apostles or the four Evangelists of the Most Serene Republic. I would not have turned aside to allow even the Doge to pass, and I do not believe that since Satan fell from heaven, any creature was ever prouder or more insolent than I. I went to the Ridotto, and played with a luck which seemed absolutely infernal. I received the best of all society—the sons of ruined families, women of the theatre, shrewd knaves, parasites, hectoring swashbucklers. But notwithstanding the dissipation of such a life, I always remained faithful to Clarimonde. I loved her wildly. She would have excited satiety itself, and chained inconstancy. To have Clarimonde was to have twenty mis-

## *Clarimonde*

tresses; aye, to possess all women; so mobile, so varied of aspect, so fresh in new charms was she all in herself—a very chameleon of a woman, in sooth. She made you commit with her the infidelity you would have committed with another, by donning to perfection the character, the attraction, the style of beauty of the woman who appeared to please you. She returned my love a hundred-fold, and it was in vain that the young patricians and even the Ancients of the Council of Ten made her the most magnificent proposals. A Foscari even went so far as to offer to espouse her. She rejected all his overtures. Of gold she had enough. She wished no longer for anything but love—a love youthful, pure, evoked by herself, and which should be a first and last passion. I would have been perfectly happy but for a cursed nightmare which recurred every night, and in which I believed myself to be a poor village curé, practising mortification and penance for my excesses during the day. Reassured by my constant association with

## *Clarimonde*

her, I never thought further of the strange manner in which I had become acquainted with Clarimonde. But the words of the Abbé Sérapion concerning her recurred often to my memory, and never ceased to cause me uneasiness.

For some time the health of Clarimonde had not been so good as usual; her complexion grew paler day by day. The physicians who were summoned could not comprehend the nature of her malady and knew not how to treat it. They all prescribed some insignificant remedies, and never called a second time. Her paleness, nevertheless, visibly increased, and she became colder and colder, until she seemed almost as white and dead as upon that memorable night in the unknown castle. I grieved with anguish unspeakable to behold her thus slowly perishing; and she, touched by my agony, smiled upon me sweetly and sadly with the fateful smile of those who feel that they must die.

One morning I was seated at her bedside,



## *Clarimonde*

and breakfasting from a little table placed close at hand, so that I might not be obliged to leave her for a single instant. In the act of cutting some fruit I accidentally inflicted rather a deep gash on my finger. The blood immediately gushed forth in a little purple jet, and a few drops spurted upon Clarimonde. Her eyes flashed, her face suddenly assumed an expression of savage and ferocious joy such as I had never before observed in her. She leaped out of her bed with animal agility—the agility, as it were, of an ape or a cat—and sprang upon my wound, which she commenced to suck with an air of unutterable pleasure. She swallowed the blood in little mouthfuls, slowly and carefully, like a connoisseur tasting a wine from Xeres or Syracuse. Gradually her eyelids half closed, and the pupils of her green eyes became oblong instead of round. From time to time she paused in order to kiss my hand, then she would recommence to press her lips to the lips of the wound in order to coax forth a few more ruddy drops.

## *Clarimonde*

When she found that the blood would no longer come, she arose with eyes liquid and brilliant, rosier than a May dawn; her face full and fresh, her hand warm and moist—in fine, more beautiful than ever, and in the most perfect health.

“I shall not die! I shall not die!” she cried, clinging to my neck, half mad with joy. “I can love thee yet for a long time. My life is thine, and all that is of me comes from thee. A few drops of thy rich and noble blood, more precious and more potent than all the elixirs of the earth, have given me back life.”

This scene long haunted my memory, and inspired me with strange doubts in regard to Clarimonde; and the same evening, when slumber had transported me to my presbytery, I beheld the Abbé Sérapion, graver and more anxious of aspect than ever. He gazed attentively at me, and sorrowfully exclaimed: “Not content with losing your soul, you now desire also to lose your body. Wretched young man, into how terrible a

## *Clarimonde*

plight have you fallen!" The tone in which he uttered these words powerfully affected me, but in spite of its vividness even that impression was soon dissipated, and a thousand other cares erased it from my mind. At last one evening, while looking into a mirror whose traitorous position she had not taken into account, I saw Clarimonde in the act of emptying a powder into the cup of spiced wine which she had long been in the habit of preparing after our repasts. I took the cup, feigned to carry it to my lips, and then placed it on the nearest article of furniture as though intending to finish it at my leisure. Taking advantage of a moment when the fair one's back was turned, I threw the contents under the table, after which I retired to my chamber and went to bed, fully resolved not to sleep, but to watch and discover what should come of all this mystery. I did not have to wait long. Clarimonde entered in her night-dress, and having removed her apparel, crept into bed and lay down beside me. When she felt assured

## *Clarimonde*

that I was asleep, she bared my arm, and drawing a gold pin from her hair, commenced to murmur in a low voice:

“One drop, only one drop ! One ruby at the end of my needle. . . . Since thou lovest me yet, I must not die ! . . . Ah, poor love ! His beautiful blood, so brightly purple, I must drink it. Sleep, my only treasure ! Sleep, my god, my child ! I will do thee no harm ; I will only take of thy life what I must to keep my own from being forever extinguished. But that I love thee so much, I could well resolve to have other lovers whose veins I could drain ; but since I have known thee all other men have become hateful to me. . . . Ah, the beautiful arm ! How round it is ! How white it is ! How shall I ever dare to prick this pretty blue vein !” And while thus murmuring to herself she wept, and I felt her tears raining on my arm as she clasped it with her hands. At last she took the resolve, slightly punctured me with her pin, and commenced to suck up the blood which

## *Clarimonde*

oozed from the place. Although she swallowed only a few drops, the fear of weakening me soon seized her, and she carefully tied a little band around my arm, afterward rubbing the wound with an unguent which immediately cicatrized it.

Further doubts were impossible. The Abbé Sérapion was right. Notwithstanding this positive knowledge, however, I could not cease to love Clarimonde, and I would gladly of my own accord have given her all the blood she required to sustain her factitious life. Moreover, I felt but little fear of her. The woman seemed to plead with me for the vampire, and what I had already heard and seen sufficed to reassure me completely. In those days I had plenteous veins, which would not have been so easily exhausted as at present ; and I would not have thought of bargaining for my blood, drop by drop. I would rather have opened myself the veins of my arm and said to her: “Drink, and may my love infiltrate itself throughout thy body together with my

## *Clarimonde*

blood !” I carefully avoided ever making the least reference to the narcotic drink she had prepared for me, or to the incident of the pin, and we lived in the most perfect harmony.

Yet my priestly scruples commenced to torment me more than ever, and I was at a loss to imagine what new penance I could invent in order to mortify and subdue my flesh. Although these visions were involuntary, and though I did not actually participate in anything relating to them, I could not dare to touch the body of Christ with hands so impure and a mind defiled by such debauches whether real or imaginary. In the effort to avoid falling under the influence of these wearisome hallucinations, I strove to prevent myself from being overcome by sleep. I held my eyelids open with my fingers, and stood for hours together leaning upright against the wall, fighting sleep with all my might ; but the dust of drowsiness invariably gathered upon my eyes at last, and finding all resistance use-

## *Clarimonde*

less, I would have to let my arms fall in the extremity of despairing weariness, and the current of slumber would again bear me away to the perfidious shores. Sérapion addressed me with the most vehement exhortations, severely reproaching me for my softness and want of fervor. Finally, one day when I was more wretched than usual, he said to me : "There is but one way by which you can obtain relief from this continual torment, and though it is an extreme measure it must be made use of ; violent diseases require violent remedies. I know where Clarimonde is buried. It is necessary that we shall disinter her remains, and that you shall behold in how pitiable a state the object of your love is. Then you will no longer be tempted to lose your soul for the sake of an unclean corpse devoured by worms, and ready to crumble into dust. That will assuredly restore you to yourself." For my part, I was so tired of this double life that I at once consented, desiring to ascertain beyond a doubt whether a priest

## *Clarimonde*

or a gentleman had been the victim of delusion. I had become fully resolved either to kill one of the two men within me for the benefit of the other, or else to kill both, for so terrible an existence could not last long and be endured. The Abbé Sérapion provided himself with a mattock, a lever, and a lantern, and at midnight we wended our way to the cemetery of —, the location and place of which were perfectly familiar to him. After having directed the rays of the dark lantern upon the inscriptions of several tombs, we came at last upon a great slab, half concealed by huge weeds and devoured by mosses and parasitic plants, whereupon we deciphered the opening lines of the epitaph :

Here lies Clarimonde  
Who was famed in her life-time  
As the fairest of women.\*

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\* Ici git Clarimonde  
Qui fut de son vivant  
La plus belle du monde.

The broken beauty of the lines is unavoidably lost in the translation.



## *Clarimonde*

“It is here without a doubt,” muttered Sérapion, and placing his lantern on the ground, he forced the point of the lever under the edge of the stone and commenced to raise it. The stone yielded, and he proceeded to work with the mattock. Darker and more silent than the night itself, I stood by and watched him do it, while he, bending over his dismal toil, streamed with sweat, panted, and his hard-coming breath seemed to have the harsh tone of a death rattle. It was a weird scene, and had any persons from without beheld us, they would assuredly have taken us rather for profane wretches and shroud-stealers than for priests of God. There was something grim and fierce in Sérapion’s zeal which lent him the air of a demon rather than of an apostle or an angel, and his great aquiline face, with all its stern features brought out in strong relief by the lantern-light, had something fearsome in it which enhanced the unpleasant fancy. I felt an icy sweat come out upon my forehead in huge beads, and my hair stood up

## *Clarimonde*

with a hideous fear. Within the depths of my own heart I felt that the act of the austere Sérapion was an abominable sacrilege ; and I could have prayed that a triangle of fire would issue from the entrails of the dark clouds, heavily rolling above us, to reduce him to cinders. The owls which had been nestling in the cypress-trees, startled by the gleam of the lantern, flew against it from time to time, striking their dusty wings against its panes, and uttering plaintive cries of lamentation ; wild foxes yelped in the far darkness, and a thousand sinister noises detached themselves from the silence. At last Sérapion's mattock struck the coffin itself, making its planks reëcho with a deep sonorous sound, with that terrible sound nothingness utters when stricken. He wrenched apart and tore up the lid, and I beheld Clarimonde, pallid as a figure of marble, with hands joined ; her white winding-sheet made but one fold from her head to her feet. A little crimson drop sparkled like a speck of dew at one corner of her colorless mouth.

## *Clarimonde*

Sérapion, at this spectacle, burst into fury :  
“ Ah, thou art here, demon! Impure courtesan! Drinker of blood and gold!” And he flung holy water upon the corpse and the coffin, over which he traced the sign of the cross with his sprinkler. Poor Clarimonde had no sooner been touched by the blessed spray than her beautiful body crumbled into dust, and became only a shapeless and frightful mass of cinders and half-calcinéd bones.

“ Behold your mistress, my Lord Romuald!” cried the inexorable priest, as he pointed to these sad remains. “ Will you be easily tempted after this to promenade on the Lido or at Fusina with your beauty?” I covered my face with my hands, a vast ruin had taken place within me. I returned to my presbytery, and the noble Lord Romuald, the lover of Clarimonde, separated himself from the poor priest with whom he had kept such strange company so long. But once only, the following night, I saw Clarimonde. She said to me, as she had said

## *Clarimonde*

the first time at the portals of the church :  
“Unhappy man ! Unhappy man ! What hast thou done ? Wherefore have hearkened to that imbecile priest ? Wert thou not happy ? And what’ harm had I ever done thee that thou shouldst violate my poor tomb, and lay bare the miseries of my nothingness ? All communication between our souls and our bodies is henceforth forever broken. Adieu ! Thou wilt yet regret me !” She vanished in air as smoke, and I never saw her more.

Alas ! she spoke truly indeed. I have regretted her more than once, and I regret her still. My soul’s peace has been very dearly bought. The love of God was not too much to replace such a love as hers. And this, brother, is the story of my youth. Never gaze upon a woman, and walk abroad only with eyes ever fixed upon the ground ; for however chaste and watchful one may be, the error of a single moment is enough to make one lose eternity.



## **ADDENDA**



## CLARIMONDE .

THE idea of love after death has been introduced by Gautier into several beautiful creations, sometimes Hoffmanesquely, sometimes with an exquisite sweetness peculiarly his own. Among his most touching poems, there is a fantastic—*Les Tâches Jaunes*—so remarkable that I cannot refrain from offering a rude translation of it. Though transplanted even by a master-hand into the richest soil of another language, such poetical flora necessarily lose something of their strange color and magical perfume. In this instance, the translator, who is no poet, only strives to convey the beautiful weirdness of the original idea :

With elbow buried in the downy pillow  
I've lain and read,  
All through the night, a volume strangely written  
In tongues long dead.

For at my bedside lie no dainty slippers ;  
And save my own,  
Under the paling lamp I hear no breathing :  
I am alone !



## *Addenda*

But there are yellow bruises on my body  
    And violet stains ;  
Though no white vampire came with lips blood-  
    crimsoned  
    To suck my veins !

Now I bethink me of a sweet weird story,  
    That in the dark  
Our dead loves thus with seal of chilly kisses  
    Our bodies mark.

Gliding beneath the coverings of our couches  
    They share our rest,  
And with their dead lips sign their loving visit  
    On arm and breast.

Darksome and cold the bed where now she slum-  
    bers  
    I loved in vain,  
With sweet soft eyelids closed, to be reopened  
    Never again.

Dead sweetheart, can it be that thou hast lifted  
    With thy frail hand  
Thy coffin-lid, to come to me again  
    From shadowland ?

Thou who, one joyous night, didst, pale and  
    speechless,  
    Pass from us all,  
Dropping thy silken mask and gift of flowers  
    Amidst the ball ?

*Addenda*

O, fondest of my loves, from that far heaven  
Where thou must be,  
Hast thou returned to pay the debt of kisses  
Thou owest me ?

6



**JETTATURA**



# JETȚATURA.

BY THÉOPHILE GAUTIER.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE good ship *Léopold*, the large steamer which plies between Marseilles and Naples, had just doubled Cape Procida. The passengers were all on deck, suddenly cured of their sea-sickness by the sight of land, a more efficacious remedy than Malta pills and other recipes prescribed by physicians for this purpose.

A group of Englishmen were assembled on the upper deck, reserved for first-class passengers. They were all close-shaven, their cravats were tied with religious care, and their high, straight collars were as stiff as bristol-board; their hands were encased in Suède gloves, and the varnish on their boots shone brightly in the sun. This group was composed of lords, members of the House of Commons, great merchants. Regent Street

very dignified, and unspeakably bored. There were women in profusion, too, as English-women are not as sedentary as the females of other countries, and rarely miss an opportunity to get away from their little island. These charming persons murmured the sacramental phrase: "*Vedi Napoli poi mori*," with the most delicious English accent, while they consulted their tourist guides or made notes of their impressions in their little memorandum-books, without paying the least attention to the tender glances cast upon them, *à la* don Juan, by a number of conceited Parisians who hovered about this bevy of loveliness, while the indignant mammas read long lectures to these fair misses on the impropriety of the French.

Three or four young men puffed away at their cigars as they walked up and down the quarter-deck, and eagerly noted the ever-changing panorama which was passing before their enchanted eyes. It was evident that these young men were artists, judging by their straw hats, their sack coats ornamented with huge horn buttons, and their wide duck trousers, without taking into consideration the fact that they wore their moustaches *à la* Van Dyck, and their hair either curled *à la* Rubens or cut straight *à la* Paul Véronèse.

The third-class passengers were groupec

in the bow of the steamer, leaning against the rigging or seated on coils of rope, munching away contentedly at the remnants of their provisions, and totally oblivious of the magnificence of their surroundings.

It was a glorious day; the blue waves came in gentle ripples, having barely the strength to obliterate the foaming wake of the vessel; the vapor from the smoke-stack, which formed in clouds in the beautiful sky, gradually dissolved in snowy flakes, while the paddle-wheels, revolving in a shower of liquid gold, joyfully churned the waters as if conscious of the proximity of a port.

The long line of hills extending from Paasilippi to Vesuvius which forms the wonderful gulf in which Naples lies like a nymph reposing on the banks of a stream after a bath, began to unfold itself in the distance in purple undulations, and stood out in bold relief against the azure sky; several little white specks on the dark background denoted the presence of villas, scattered here and there over the country. The sails of the fishing-smacks as they entered the harbor glided over the blue waters like the feathers of a swan scattered by the breeze, proving the activity of man even in the midst of the majestic solitude of the ocean.

• A few more turns of the paddle-wheels and



the ship comes in sight of the Château of Saint Elmé and the Convent of St. Martin, which stand out prominently on the summit of the mountain at whose base Naples is situated, rising far above the church steeples, the house-tops, the terraces of the hotels, and the *façades* of the palaces. Before long the Château d'Œuf, crouching on its foam-washed reef, seemed to be advancing to meet the steamer, and the jetty, with its revolving light, stretched itself out like an arm holding a torch.

At the extremity of the bay, Vesuvius now changed the bluish tints which distance had lent it, for a more vigorous color; her sides were furrowed with ravines and streaks of congealed lava, and from her summit, pierced with little holes like a pepper-box, small jets of white smoke ascended every now and then.

Chiatamone, Pizzo-Falcone, the wharf of Santa Lucia, lined with hotels, the Palazzo-Real, with its myriads of balconies, the Palazzo-Nuovo, and the Arsenal were now in view, while the ships of all nations intermingled their masts and spars like a forest of leafless trees.

At this moment a passenger, who had not stirred out of his cabin during the entire trip, made his first appearance on deck. Whether he kept to himself on account of sea-sickness, or whether it was because he did not

care to mingle with the other passengers, is not known ; moreover, this spectacle, novel to the others, had lost all charms to him, as he had seen all these interesting points time and again.

He was between twenty-six and twenty-eight years old, at least a stranger would have formed such an opinion at first sight. His hair was of that peculiar dark brown which the English style auburn. In the sun it shone like a dull copper, while in the dark it was almost black ; he had a forehead which would have delighted a phrenologist, an aquiline nose of noble curve, well-shaped lips, and a round and symmetrical chin ; and yet all these features, regular though they were, did not form a pleasing *ensemble*. They lacked that mysterious harmony which softens the outlines and moulds them to perfection. There is a certain legend which tells of an Italian painter, who, wishing to represent the archangel, composed a mask of incongruous beauty, and in this manner gave his portrait a certain terrible expression without resorting to horns, inverted eyebrows and a contracted mouth. The stranger's countenance produced just such an effect. His eyes, especially, were extraordinary ; his black eyelashes contrasted strangely with the peculiar pale gray of the pupils and with his dark brown hair :

then, the thinness of the bones in his nose made them appear closer together than the principles of drawing permit them to be, and their expression was really indefinable. When they were not resting on something, a peculiar melancholy and languid look was depicted in the gleaming orbs ; if they fixed themselves on any one, the eyebrows immediately contracted and frowned until they formed a perpendicular wrinkle in his forehead ; from a pale gray, the pupils would turn green, tinged with little black spots, and streaked with yellow ; the glance they emitted was sharp, almost painful ; then, suddenly, everything acquired its former placidity, and this person of mephistophelic appearance once more assumed the bearing of a young man of the world, a member of the Jockey Club, who is about to spend the season in Naples, and is thoroughly contented to tread on a pavement of lava in preference to the unsteady deck of *The Leopold*.

His attire was elegant, though not conspicuous : a frock-coat of dark blue, a polka-dotted tie carefully knotted, a waistcoat of the same pattern as the tie, light gray trousers, and a pair of fine patent-leather shoes completed his toilette ; his watch-chain was of plain gold, and his eye-glasses dangled from a neat silk ribbon ; his well-gloved

hand twirled a hickory walking-stick, ornamented with a silver knob on which a coat-of-arms was engraved.

He took a few steps on the deck, then, leaning over the taffrail, he permitted his eyes to wander toward the pier on which carriages were stationed and where a crowd of idlers had assembled looking anxiously forward to the arrival of the steamer.

A flotilla of small boats had already set out from the pier to storm *The Leopold*, loaded with hotel runners, servants seeking employment, facchini and other rascals of an assorted type who had long since learned to look upon strangers as their natural prey; each rower was doing his utmost to reach the steamer first, and the oarsmen exchanged vile epithets and coarse oaths, calculated to frighten those not acquainted with the habits of the lower class of Neapolitans.

The young man with the auburn hair, in order to see better had placed his eye-glasses on his nose; but his attention, attracted by the concert of yells and shrieks which arose from the flotilla, concentrated itself on the boats; no doubt the noise annoyed him, for his brows contracted, the wrinkle in his forehead grew deeper, and the pupils of his eyes turned from gray to a greenish yellow.

● Suddenly a huge, foam-crested wave, roll-

ing in from the open sea, raised the steamer high in the air and rushed on towards the pier, where it dashed itself in its mad fury against the promenaders, who were completely taken by surprise with this unexpected shower-bath ; then, rolling backward, it brought a number of the small boats into violent contact, upsetting three or four *facchini*, who fell headlong into the water. The accident was not serious, as these rascals all swim like fish, and a moment later they reappeared on the surface, their hair matted closely together, and spitting out the salt water by the mouthful. They seemed to be as surprised at this sudden immersion as was Telemachus, the son of Ulysses, when Minerva, in the guise of the wise Mentor, threw him headlong from the summit of a high cliff into the sea to tear him away from the love of Eucharis.

Behind this strange tourist, standing at a respectful distance, alongside a pile of luggage, was a little groom, a species of dried-up-old-man-of-fifteen, a veritable gnome in livery, resembling one of those dwarfs whom Chinese ingenuity alone can produce ; his face was as flat as a board, and his nose was scarcely perceptible, looking as if it had been compressed in childhood, while his eyes had that docile expression which certain naturalists claim exists in the toad. No protuber-

ance rounded his shoulders or bulged out his chest ; and yet he gave one the impression that he was a hunchback, although it would have been a hard matter to find the hump. In a word, he was a model groom, and he might have presented himself at the Ascot races and at the spring meeting at Chantilly without fear of being too closely scrutinized ; any gentleman rider would have accepted his services, notwithstanding his repulsive appearance. He was unattractive, but irreproachable in his way, like his master.

At last the steamer ran up alongside the pier and the passengers went ashore ; the porters, after an exchange of gross insults, divided the passengers and the luggage between them, and took the road to the different hotels with which Naples is plentifully supplied.

The traveller with the auburn hair and his groom started for the Hotel de Rome, followed by a phalanx of robust facchini who pretended to perspire and totter beneath the weight of a hat-box or a light parcel, in the hope of receiving an extra large *pourboire*, while four or five of their comrades brought all of their muscles into play as they pushed a wheelbarrow before them containing two ordinary-sized trunks.

When they reached the hotel and the

*padron di casa* had designated his apartment to the new arrival, the porters, notwithstanding the fact that they had been paid thrice the value for their services, began to gesticulate wildly and cry out in a half-supplicating, half-threatening manner for a tip. They all talked together and swore by all the saints on the calendar that they had not been sufficiently rewarded for their labor. Paddy, who remained alone to listen to their recriminations—for his master, unheeding the demands and the entreaties of the *facchini*, had already ascended the grand staircase—looked for all the world like a monkey surrounded by a pack of dogs. He attempted to quiet the porters by a bit of a harangue in his own tongue, but, as the English language failed to produce the desired effect, he clinched his fists and, assuming the attitude of a boxer, to the great amusement of the *facchini*, he suddenly let fly his right in a manner worthy of a Tom Cribbs or a Sawyer, and caught the gigantic leader of the gang full in the pit of the stomach, sending him to mother earth in the most approved fashion.

This exploit routed the rest of the band; the colossus pulled himself together with an effort and rose to his feet, considerably the worse for wear, and skulked away, without even vowing vengeance, rubbing his stomach

and thoroughly satisfied that a veritable demon was concealed in the person of that little dog-faced groom whom he had thought he could have knocked over with a whiff of his breath.

The stranger, having sent for the landlord, inquired whether a letter addressed to M. Paul d'Aspremont had not been left at the office for him. The proprietor replied that a letter bearing this name had been awaiting his arrival for over a week, and hastened to bring it up.

The letter, enclosed in a heavy envelope, cream-lead in color, sealed with a bit of blue wax, was written in that peculiar and elegant style of handwriting which denotes the possessor of an excellent education, and which is used to a great extent among the young ladies of the English nobility.

The note, which M. d'Aspremont opened with a haste not prompted by curiosity alone, ran as follows :

“MY DEAR MONSIEUR D'ASPREMONT :—  
We have been stopping in Naples for the past two months. During the voyage, which was made in short stages, my uncle complained bitterly of the heat, the mosquitoes, the wine, the butter and the beds ; he declared that one must be really crazy to abandon a comfortable cottage, within a few miles of London, to travel over dusty roads on



which only second-class taverns are to be found, taverns in which an honest English dog would be ashamed to pass a single night; but, in spite of his grumbling, he accompanied me here—just as he would have followed me to the end of the world; he is none the worse for the trip and my health has greatly improved. We have taken up our quarters in a little whitewashed villa near the sea, in a sort of a virgin forest composed of citron and orange trees, myrtle, laurel and rose bushes and other exotic plants. From the summit of the bluff we have a delightful view of the surrounding country, and you will find a cup of tea or an iced lemonade awaiting you any evening you may call. My uncle, whom you have fascinated, I know not how, will be delighted to press your hand. Is it necessary for me to add that your devoted servant would not be sorry to do likewise, although you hurt her fingers with your ring when you bid her adieu on the jetty at Folkestone.

“ALICIA W.”

## CHAPTER II.

PAUL D'ASPREMONT, after dining in his room, ordered a carriage. As there are always a number stationed near the hotels awaiting the call of tourists, Paul's wish was instantly gratified. The hack horses of Naples are so thin, that, if they were placed alongside the famous Parisian *rosse* the latter

would be accused of *embonpoint*; their emaciated heads, their ribs looking for all the world like so many barrel staves, their projecting backbones which are always flayed and bleeding, seem to implore the butcher to use his knife to put an end to their torture, for it is regarded as a crime by the Southern Jehu to feed his horses; the harness is considerably the worse for wear and is frequently pieced together with bits of rope, and when the driver gathers up his reins and cracks his whip one would really suppose that the horses would faint and the carriage disappear in smoke, like Cinderella's turnout when she returned from the ball after midnight, against the command of the good fairy. But such is not the case; the nags brace up on their legs, and, after a moment's hesitation, take up a gallop which they never relinquish: the coachman somehow or other imbues them with fresh energy, and he knows how to draw out by a vigorous application of his whip the last spark of life contained in their old carcasses. We will not attempt to explain how it is that these maimed brutes can equal in speed the fastest English trotters, for the feat is beyond our comprehension. But this miracle is of daily occurrence in Naples, and no one seems surprised by the fact.

• M. Paul d'Aspremont's carriage dashed

through the compact crowd, grazing the acquaiuloi, citron venders' stands, the open-air macaroni shops, and the bazaars in which citruls and other sea-fruits are for sale. The lazzaroni, enveloped in their long, hooded cloaks, dozed on the sidewalk heedless of the passing vehicles. From time to time a *carriccolo*, with its huge red wheels, would dash by, the box-seats occupied by a mass of monks, nurses, *facchini* and other rascals. The *carricoli* are almost obsolete at present, and it is against the law to build new ones, but one can put a new box on the old wheels or new wheels on an old box, and in this ingenious manner manage to keep these curious vehicles before the public.

Our traveller paid but little attention to this picturesque and ever-changing panorama, which certainly would have gladdened the heart of any other tourist, unless he, too, was so fortunate as to find a letter signed "Alicia W.," awaiting his arrival at the Hotel de Rome.

But M. d'Aspremont had no eye for all this. He glanced carelessly at the limpid sea with its myriads of islands—even Capri, Ischia, Nisida and Procida failed to arouse his enthusiasm. His eyes were seeking that little white house, surrounded with shrubbery, in the environs of Sorrento, of which Alicia spoke in her letter. At this moment, M.

d'Aspremont's countenance had nothing of that disagreeable expression which characterized it when he was displeased ; it was really handsome and sympathetic. It was easy to understand that this person of distinction could not fail to please a young English miss, brought up by an indulgent old uncle.

As the driver urged his horses to do their utmost, it did not take long to pass Chiaja and Marinella, and the carriage soon entered the road which is now monopolized by the steam-cars. A thick, black dust, not unlike ground charcoal, gave an almost plutonic aspect to this part of the beach, which is washed by the blue waters of the gulf ; it is the soot of Vesuvius, sifted by the wind, which gives this dusky appearance to the sand and causes the houses of Portici and Torre del Greco to resemble the factories of Birmingham. M. d'Aspremont heeded not the contrast between the ebony-hued beach and the sapphire-colored sky—he was in a hurry to arrive at his destination. The most beautiful roads are tediously long when Miss Alicia is awaiting your coming, six months after saying good-bye on the jetty at Folkstone : the sky and the sea of Naples have lost their charm—what are sky and sea to a man of the world, especially when the woman he loves awaits him at the end of the road.

Finally, the carriage enters the private road which leads to the little white house on the hill. A sunburnt servant, with closely matted hair, hurried to open the gate at the approach of the carriage, and, preceding M. d'Aspremont in a path bordered on either side with laurel-rose bushes, conducted him to the terrace where Miss Alicia Ward and her uncle were sipping their afternoon tea.

Through mere caprice, a fault pardonable in a young girl who is *blasée* of all the comforts and attractions of city life—and possibly also to tease her uncle—Miss Alicia had selected this villa in preference to any of the more modern dwellings offered for rent. Its owners were travelling and it had been unoccupied for several years. She found a sort of poetic wildness in this deserted garden, which had almost reverted to its original state, and which, owing to the warm climate, was entirely overrun with orange trees, myrtle, geraniums, and citrons. It was not like in the North, where a deserted house is the most dreary object imaginable, but the wild gaiety of the South left to herself; in the absence of the master, the exuberant vegetation was having a veritable debauch of leaves, flowers, fruits and perfume.

When the Commodore—it was thus that Alicia called her uncle—first saw this kn-

penetrable thicket through which it was impossible to effect a passage without a liberal application of the axe, as in the virgin forests of Central America, he raised his hands to Heaven in horror and declared that his niece had lost her senses. But Alicia promised to have an entrance made from the gate of the salon, and another passage, large enough to permit of the entrance of a barrel of malmsey wine, from the salon to the terrace—but this was the only concession she would accord to her uncle. The Commodore, unable to resist the persuasions of his lovely niece, resigned himself to his fate, and at this moment he was seated opposite her on the terrace, contentedly sipping a big tumbler of rum, which the servants, in their innocence, mistook for English breakfast tea.

As M. d'Aspremont made his appearance on the terrace, Alicia sprang to her feet with a little cry of joyful surprise and ran up to meet him. Paul shook her warmly by the hand, but the young girl suddenly raised the imprisoned hand to the height of her friend's lips with a little movement which was full of playful coquetry.

After a desperate effort, the Commodore finally managed to raise himself on his gouty legs, but it was amusing to behold the expression of joy mingled with pain which

spread o'er his countenance as he attempted to walk. However, the old sailor was not to be daunted.

Gritting his teeth, he stepped boldly forward, and approaching the young people, stretched forth his hand to Paul as he gave him a hearty welcome.

Miss Alicia Ward was one of those charming women in whom the commingling of the dark and blonde types produces an ideal beauty; her full lips were red as cherries, while her shining hair was dark as a raven's wing, in direct contrast with her complexion, which challenged comparison with that "whiteness of the lily, and clearness of alabaster" in which a poet delights when singing the praises of the mistress of his heart. The effect of this is irresistible, and produces a peculiar style of beauty not to be found elsewhere.

Perhaps the harems of the East contain fair Circassians of a like complexion, if we can believe the flowery extravagance of Eastern poets, or the aquarelles of Lewis, representing scenes in the seraglio.

Alicia was certainly a perfect type of this class of beauty. Her oval face, pure complexion, delicate nose and transparent nostrils, her deep blue eyes fringed with long, dark lashes which hovered on her cheeks like

black butterflies when she lowered her eyes ; her hair falling in brilliant masses like satin ribbons down her swan-like neck, and clinging about her face, proved the possibility of Maclise's romantic figures which are usually held to be but dreams.

She wore a dress of grenadine, embroidered with red palm-leaves, which accorded well with the strings of coral which were woven in her hair and encircled her throat and arms ; from her delicate shell-like ears hung pendants formed of numerous small pieces of coral deftly strung together. If the reader blame this abuse of coral, remember that we are in Naples, where the fishermen go down to the bottom of the sea only to find these wonderful branches which blush like a maiden when exposed to the sunlight.

After the portrait of Miss Alicia Ward, we feel obliged to give, by way of contrast, a caricature, *à la* Hogarth, of her uncle, the Commodore. . He was about sixty years old, and his face was a dark purple, contrasting strongly with his white eyebrows and mutton-chop whiskers, which were sharply defined, and gave him the appearance of an old Indian who had decorated his face with white paint. The warm Italian sun had still further deepened this violet color, and the Commodore made one think involuntarily



of a large burnt almond packed in cotton. He was dressed from top to toe in a suit of grayish-brown tweed, with gaiters to match, which his tailor had assured him, on his word of honor, was the latest and most fashionable color, which probably was true. Notwithstanding his inflamed complexion and grotesque costume, the Commodore looked above the common herd. His scrupulous neatness, noble bearing and courtly manners bespoke the perfect gentleman, although he certainly looked like one of the caricatures in Hoffman's or Levassar's comedies. His only occupation was to adore his niece and to drink an enormous quantity of Jamaica rum, to preserve the radical humidity, after the style of Corporal Trim.

"See how well I am looking and how pretty I am! Look at my rosy color—I am not as red as uncle, it is true, but then I never touch Jamaica rum or old London Dock—and yet my cheeks are red, most decidedly red," exclaimed Alicia, as she tapped her face with her tapering, well-shaped finger: "I have grown stout, too, and there are no longer any of those horrid circles under my eyes like there used to be when I wanted to look my prettiest at a ball. I say, Paul, I must be indeed a great coquette to deprive myself of the company of my *fiancé* during

three long months, so that he will find me looking all the fresher and prettier after the separation ! ”

And, as she gave vent to this little outburst of feeling, Alicia stood up on her tip-toes as if to provoke Paul and defy his examination.

“ Isn't she as strong and hearty as those Procida girls who carry Grecian amphoras on their heads ? ” interrupted the Commodore.

“ Pardon me, Commodore, ” answered Paul ; “ Miss Alicia has not grown prettier, that would be impossible ; but she is in decidedly better health than when she imposed this cruel separation upon me out of mere caprice—or coquetry, as she pretends. ”

And he turned his eyes full upon the young girl who stood before him.

Suddenly, the rosy hue, of which but a moment before she seemed so proud, disappeared from Alicia's cheeks, and she carried her hand to her heart with a movement of pain.

Paul, thoroughly alarmed, rose to his feet; the Commodore did likewise. The bright color suddenly reappeared in Alicia's cheeks as she smilingly remarked :

“ I promised you a cup of tea or a sorbet, and, although English, I recommend the sorbet. The snow is preferable to hot water in this clime, where the African sirocco visits us almost daily. ”

They seated themselves around the little stone table ; the sun had sunk beneath the horizon, and the soft twilight of the Neapolitan night succeeded the glaring light of day. The rising moon gave a silvery tint to the surrounding foliage ; the sea broke upon the pebbly beach with a gentle murmur, and in the distance the beating of drums could be plainly heard as the guards were relieved for the night.

At last they were obliged to part ; Nicè, the fawn-colored servant with the matted hair, conducted Paul to the gate, lighting the way with a torch. While she was serving the tea and the sorbets she had fastened a look of curiosity, mingled with fear, on the new arrival. No doubt the result of her examination was unfavorable to Paul, for Nicè's brow, yellow as a cigar already, gathered itself up into innumerable wrinkles, and, as she accompanied the stranger, she secretly pointed her little finger at him, and crossed her three other fingers over her thumb, as if to form some cabalistic sign.

### CHAPTER III.

PAUL returned to the Hotel de Rome by the same road ; the beauty of the night was

incomparable ; the moon reflected her silver rays on the waves, which, as they broke gently upon the beach, seemed to burst into myriads of glittering sparks. The fishing-smacks, carrying a lighted torch in the prow, skimmed over the surface of the sea, leaving a silvery trail in their wake ; the smoke of Vesuvius, white in the daylight, was now a glistening column of fire which reflected strangely on the waters of the gulf.

A few strolling lazzaroni were reclining on the sands, deeply moved without knowing it at this magical spectacle, as they gazed long and earnestly into the limpid waters of the bay. Others, seated on the deck of a bark at anchor, were either singing an air from *Lucia* or the romanza so popular at the time : "*Ti voglio ben' assai,*" in a voice of which many a tenor might well be envious. Naples, like all other Southern cities, retires late ; however, the lights in the windows gradually disappeared, one by one, but the lottery offices, with their garlands of paper flowers and their favorite numbers gaily illuminated, were still open in the hope that the few passers-by would come in and put a few carlins or a couple of ducats on some pet number on their way home.

Paul went right to bed, and, drawing the mosquito netting tightly about him, was soon

fast asleep. Like most travellers after a sea voyage, his couch, although perfectly stationary, appeared to roll and plunge as if the Hotel de Rome had been the *Leopold*. Under this impression he dreamed that he was still at sea, and he saw Alicia standing on the jetty, pale as death, alongside of her red-faced uncle, who was making desperate signs for him not to come ashore ; the young girl's face expressed profound grief, and in motioning him away she seemed to obey a mysterious impulse in spite of herself.

Paul now awoke with a start ; this dream strangely affected him, and he was ashamed to find that he was in the hotel instead of at sea, with the *veilleuse* burning brightly alongside the bed and attracting all the mosquitoes in the room. In order not to fall back into this painful slumber, Paul struggled against the feeling of drowsiness which almost overpowered him, and began to recall his courtship of Alicia.

In his fancy he once more beheld the red-brick house, covered with vines of honeysuckle and lilac, which Alicia and her uncle inhabited in Richmond, when he met them on the occasion of his first trip to England, having presented one of those letters of introduction which invariably result in an invitation to dinner. He remembered the white

India muslin dress, ornamented with a simple ribbon which Alicia, just home from boarding-school, wore that day, and the branch of jasmine which entwined itself in her coal-black hair like a flower in Ophelia's crown; her beautiful blue eyes and partly opened lips, exposing a row of enamelled teeth. He recalled to mind the deep blush which rose to her cheeks when the young French gentleman's eyes met hers.

The parlor, draped in sombre green and decorated with engravings of fox-hunts and steeple-chases, was reproduced in his mind as in a camera obscura. The piano stretched forth its row of keys like the teeth in the jaw of an alligator; the mantelpiece, decorated with a sprig of Irish shamrock, and its highly polished grate; the old oak armchairs, the carpet strewn with roses, and Miss Alicia, trembling like a leaf, singing the romanza from *Anna Bolena*, "*deh, non voler costringere,*" most delightfully out of tune, while Paul accompanied her on the piano, and the Commodore, overcome with an attack of indigestion and, if possible, more crimson than usual, dropped the colossal supplement of the *London Times* as he fell into a quiet doze.

Then the scene changed. Paul, now on most intimate terms, had been invited by the Commodore to visit him at his country home

in Lincolnshire—an old, feudal castle, with crenellated turrets and ivy-covered Gothic windows, but furnished in the most approved modern style. It rose at the end of a large, well-kept lawn, surrounded by a gravel path serving as a riding school for Miss Alicia, who rode one of those little Shetland ponies with flowing mane, which Sir Edwin Landseer loves to paint. Paul, mounted on a gray hunter kindly loaned him by the Commodore, accompanied Miss Ward on her daily rides, as the doctor, finding her somewhat broken down in health, had recommended plenty of exercise.

Again, a little canoe was gliding along the lake, displacing the water-lilies, and making the kingfishers beat a hasty retreat. Alicia rowed while Paul held the tiller ropes. How beautiful she looked in her straw hat, the golden halo of the noonday sun surrounding her pretty head!

The Commodore remained on shore, not on account of his dignity, but owing to his weight, which would have caused the little boat to founder; he awaited the arrival of his niece on the embankment, and threw a wrap over her shoulders, with almost motherly care, for fear she would take cold; then, after hauling the boat up high and dry, they would return to the cottage for luncheon.

Alicia, who at other times ate no more than a bird, now thoroughly enjoyed a slice of York ham, cut thin as a wafer, while she munched away at her hot biscuits without ever giving a crumb to the gold-fishes which disported themselves in a huge globe suspended by a chain from the ceiling.

But those happy days could not last forever. Paul postponed his departure by several weeks, and already signs of fall were beginning to make their appearance.

Alicia grew pale under the anxious eye of her lover, and the only color she retained were two bright spots near the temples. She was subject to chills, and the biggest fire was not sufficient to warm her. The doctor finally decided, as a last resource, that Miss Ward should pass the winter at Pisa and the spring in Naples.

Important family affairs recalled Paul to France; Alicia and the Commodore were ready to start for Italy, and the separation took place at Folkestone. Not a word on the subject had been spoken, but Miss Ward looked upon Paul as her betrothed, and the Commodore had pressed the young man's hands significantly; one only squeezes the hand of a son-in-law in so forcible a manner.

After an absence of six months, Paul was overjoyed to find Alicia looking strong and



healthy. The young girl was now a young woman, and he reasoned that the Commodore could not offer any objection when he asked for the hand of his niece in marriage.

Rocked to sleep with these pleasant thoughts he dropped off into a gentle slumber, from which he was aroused only at day-break. Naples had already begun her noisy clatter : the venders of iced-water were crying out their wares for sale ; the cooks offered the passers-by tempting morsels of roast beef for a mere song, while the lazy housewives were lowering down their baskets by the aid of a string, which they hauled up a moment later filled with tomatoes, fish, and large pieces of pumpkin. The notaries, dressed in seedy black, seated themselves at their stands as they placed their pen behind their ears ; the money changers displayed little piles of gold and silver on their tables ; while the coachmen galloped their living bone-yards, soliciting an early patronage as the bells in all the steeples merrily chimed out the *Angelus*.

Our traveller, enveloped in his dressing-gown, leaned out of the window ; from there he could plainly see Santa-Lucia and the fortress of Œuf, while an immense stretch of sea, reaching from Vesuvius to the huge promontory of Castellamare and the villas of Sorrento, unrolled itself before his eyes.

The sky was clear, but a white cloud was rapidly approaching the city, impelled by a gentle breeze. As Paul fixed his eyes upon this cloud, that peculiar expression came over his face, and his eyebrows contracted as the frown grew more pronounced. Other vapors joined this single cloud, and soon a heavy curtain hung over the Château of Saint Elmo. Large drops began to fall on the lava pavement, and soon one of those terrific rain storms for which Naples is noted burst upon the city, carrying dogs and even donkeys into the sewers before it. The crowd, taken by surprise, dispersed, seeking shelter wherever they could find it ; the open-air stores shut up shop in no time, and the rain, now mistress of the situation, swept across the quay of Santa Lucia from end to end.

The gigantic facchino to whom Paddy had applied such a vigorous thrashing was leaning against the column of a building, directly opposite the window at which Paul d'Aspremont was standing.

As he caught sight of the face at the window the Neapolitan muttered in an irritated tone :

“The captain of the *Leopold* would have done well to throw that *unbeliever* overboard,” and, passing his hand under his coarse linen blouse, he touched a bunch of amulets which was suspended around his neck.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE sun soon shone forth brightly, and it was not long before the streets were dry and filled with people. But Timberio, the porter, nevertheless retained the opinion he had formed regarding the young Frenchman, and he prudently withdrew out of range of the window: some of the other lazzaroni evinced their surprise that he should abandon such an excellent station.

“Whoever wants the place is welcome to it,” he replied, as he shook his head in a mysterious manner. “I know what I am talking about.”

Paul breakfasted in his room; whether he was bashful, or whether it was because he disliked to be among strangers, he never took his meals in public. Then he dressed himself and, in awaiting the hour for his call on Miss Ward, he visited the Museum of Studj: in an absent-minded way he admired the precious collection of antique vases, bronzes unearthed among the ruins of Pompeii, the helmet of Grecian brass, all covered with verdigris, in which reposed the head of the soldier who wore it ages ago, the bit of hardened earth retaining, as in a cast, the impression of the figure of a young woman surprised by the

eruption in the summer residence of Arrius Diomedès, and the beautiful statue of Aristides, the choicest and possibly the most perfect morsel left us of a forgotten era. But a lover is not an enthusiastic admirer of art ; in his eyes the profile of the adored one is worth more than all the Greek and Roman statues in the world.

After whiling away two or three hours at the Studj, he entered a carriage and directed the driver to proceed at once to the little villa near Sorrento where Miss Ward resided. The driver, with the intelligence which characterizes all Southern people, divined that the gentleman was in a hurry, so whipping up his tired horses he soon drove up to the villa. The same servant opened the gate. She was dressed as before, with the exception that her legs were entirely devoid of covering and that a little bunch of horns and coral charms was suspended around her neck.

Miss Alicia was reclining in an Indian hammock on the terrace, dressed in a light china-silk wrapper. Her feet, which were plainly visible through the netting of the hammock, were encased in a pair of loose sandals, and her bare arms were crossed above her head, in Cleopatra's favorite attitude.

The Commodore, dressed in a suit of white duck, was seated in a bamboo chair, and from

time to time he pulled the rope which 'set the hammock in motion.

A third personage completed the group: it was the Comte d'Altavilla, a young and elegant Neapolitan, whose presence brought to Paul's face that peculiar contraction of the features which gave it such a diabolical expression.

In fact, the 'Comte was one of those men one does not care to see beside his lady-love. He was unusually tall, although splendidly proportioned; his hair was as black as jet, and was arranged in graceful curls around the temples; a spark of Southern fire scintillated in his eyes; and his large, white teeth appeared still whiter owing to his red lips and the dark olive color of his complexion. The only fault a critic could possibly have brought to bear against the Comte was that he was too handsome.

As to his clothes, d'Altavilla had them all imported from London, and the most pronounced dandy would have approved of his attire. There was nothing at all Italian in his dress, with the exception of his shirt-studs, which were of great value. Here the love of all sons of the South for jewelry betrayed itself. He also wore a little bunch of coral charms on his watch-chain, but a tour of inspection among the promenaders in the Rue de Tolède or 'at

the Villa Reale would have sufficed to convince the most incredulous that there was nothing at all eccentric about him.

As Paul d'Aspremont entered, the Comte, at Miss Ward's urgent request, was singing some delightful Neapolitan melodies. Those who have not heard one of these charming romanzas of Gordigiani's, as sung by a lazaroni at Chiaja, or a sailor on the jetty, as he returns from his work, have missed the breath of a lifetime. They are composed of a breath of air, of a ray of moonshine, of the perfume of an orange-grove, and of the throbbing of a heart.

Alicia, with her pretty English voice, a trifle out of tune, hummed the air which she wished to remember, as she nodded a welcome to Paul, who was looking at her in anything but a pleasant manner, being annoyed at the presence of this handsome young man.

One of the ropes of the hammock suddenly parted, and Miss Ward slipped to the ground, without injuring herself, however. Six ready hands were simultaneously extended toward her, but the young girl was already on her feet, blushing furiously, for it is considered *improper* for a woman to fall in the presence of men.

"I can't understand it; I tried every one of those ropes myself," exclaimed the Com-

modore, "and Miss Ward doesn't weigh any more than a humming bird."

The Comte d'Altavilla shook his head in a mysterious manner: in the breaking of the rope he evidently saw another reason besides weight; but, man of the world as he was, he kept his opinion to himself, while he carelessly toyed with the charms on his watch chain.

Like all men who become surly and disagreeable in the presence of a rival whom they consider worthy of their steel, instead of assuming to be all grace and amiability, Paul d'Aspremont, although well versed in the customs of polite society, did not succeed in concealing his ill-humor; he only replied by monosyllables, permitting the conversation to drag, and whenever he glanced towards d'Altavilla his eyes assumed their peculiar expression; the yellow fibres shot forth beneath the gray transparency of his eyeballs like so many water-snakes in the bottom of a well.

Every time that Paul looked at him thus, the Comte, seemingly by a mechanical movement, plucked a flower from the *jardinière* and flung it from him so as to ward off the magnetism of the former's angry glance.

"What ails you that you should vent your spite on my *jardinière*?" exclaimed Miss Ward, as she suddenly noticed the number of

plants the Comte had destroyed. "What have my flowers done to you that you should wage war upon them?"

"Oh! it is nothing, Miss Alicia; merely a nervous tic," replied d'Altavilla, as he decapitated a superb rose with his finger-nail and sent it to join the other flowers on the terrace.

"Well, then, you annoy me very much," said Alicia; "and without knowing it, you have upset one of my pet theories. I have never plucked a flower in all my life. Bouquets inspire me with a feeling of horror: to me they are dead flowers, mere cadavers of roses, full of worms and periwinkles, and the odor of which has something positively sepulchral."

"To atone for the murder I have just committed," said the Comte d'Altavilla, bowing politely, "I will send you a hundred baskets of flowers in full bloom."

Paul had risen; he toyed with his hat as if he contemplated taking his departure.

"What! going already?" exclaimed Miss Ward.

"I have some letters to write—some very important letters."

"Oh! what a story!" remarked the young girl with a pretty pout; "how can you have important letters to write when I am here to listen to what you have to say in person?"



“Why don't you stay, Paul?” put in the Commodore; “I had arranged a little programme for this evening, and I only await the sanction of my niece to put it into execution: in the first place we would go to the fountain of Santa-Lucia, where we would have partaken of a glass of water which smells of rotten eggs, but which is a great appetizer, nevertheless; then we would have eaten a dozen or two of white and pink oysters, at the fish-market, dined under a vine arbor in some Neapolitan tavern, drunk chianti and lacryma-christi, and wound up the evening with a visit to Seigneur Pulcinella. The Comte would have explained all the jokes and the native dialect.”

This proposition evidently did not please M. d'Aspremont, and he retired after bowing coldly.

D'Altavilla remained a few moments longer: and as Miss Ward, vexed at Paul's sudden departure, did not enter into the spirit of the excursion proposed by the Commodore, he also took his leave.

Two hours later Miss Alicia received a large number of rare plants, but what surprised her most was an enormous pair of Sicilian bull's horns, transparent as amber, and polished like agate, measuring at least three feet. and tipped at the ends with threat-

ening, black points. A magnificent gilt bronze shield accompanied the horns, evidently designed to support them.

Vicè, who had assisted the porters to unpack the flowers and the horns, seemed to understand the motive which prompted the Comte to make such a strange gift.

She placed them on the stone table and, as they rested there, one might well have supposed that they had been torn from the front of the divine bull which carried Europa on his mighty head. Then, after a long and silent contemplation, she remarked :

“ We are now prepared to defend ourselves at least.”

“ What do you mean, Vicè ? ” questioned Miss Ward.

“ Nothing—but the French signor has very strange eyes ! ”

## CHAPTER V.

THE hour for dinner had long since passed, and the fires of hot coals, which, during the day, make a miniature Vesuvius in the kitchen of the Hotel de Rome, were slowly dying out; the pots and the pans had resumed their places on their respective nails, and shone in the semi-darkness like so many ancient breast-

plates ; a copper lamp, not unlike those unearthed at Pompeii, was suspended from the main rafter of the room by a simple chain, its three wicks lighting up the centre of the kitchen, the remainder being plunged in total darkness.

Its dull rays illuminated the countenances of an ill-assorted group—a group which would have furnished plenty of material for the brushes of an Espagnolet or a Salvator Rosa as it sat there in the semi-darkness around the chopped-up table. In the first place there was the *chef*, Virgilio Falsacappa, a very important personage—in his own estimation. He was of gigantic stature and formidable *embonpoint* ; in fact, he might have passed for one of the guests at Vitellius' banquet, if he had been attired in a Roman toga instead of a white apron. His features were strongly marked and resembled the profile of those curious heads stamped on ancient coins ; coarse, black eyebrows, half an inch thick, surmounted a pair of almond-shaped eyes ; an enormous nose cast its shadow o'er a tremendous mouth, resembling the jaw of a shark with its double row of large teeth. Bunchy side-whiskers encircled his dark visage, while his glossy, black hair, tinged with a few silver threads, fell in short ringlets on his colossal and bloated neck. His jaw

seemed, capable of crunching the bones of an ox, and the silver crescents he wore in his ears were as large as a new moon. This is master Virgilio Falsacappa, who, with his apron tucked under his belt and his knife plunged in a wooden sheath, resembled an old-time *victimarius* far more than a modern *chef*.

Then there was Timberio, the porter, who was in a state of extreme emaciation, thanks to his gymnastic calling and to the frugal diet of a handful of half-cooked macaroni, seasoned with *cacio-cavallo*, a slice of watermelon and a glass of snow water, which were the only victuals his meagre purse would allow. Had he received proper nourishment there is no doubt he would have equalled in size, if not in *embonpoint*, Virgilio Falsacappa. The only garments he wore were a pair of linen drawers, a long calico waistcoat, and a coarse cloak which was thrown across his shoulders in a careless manner.

Scazziga, the proud owner of the carriage M. Paul d'Asprémont had hired to go to Sorrento, was leaning against the table; he, too, presented a striking appearance: his irregular features wore a cunning expression, and a sarcastic smile was constantly playing about his lips. It was easy to see that he had been thrown in contact with people of

more or less distinction, for his every movement was an imitation of the gestures and mannerisms he had noted among his superiors. His clothing, purchased in some second-hand store, consisted of a semi-livery, semi-civilian attire, of which he was very proud, and which, in his opinion, was not to be compared with Timberio's cheap get-up; his conversation was replete with English and French words which at times failed to express the meaning of what he wished to convey, but which raised him high in the estimation of the kitchen maids and the pot-boys, who were surprised at such a wonderful display of knowledge.

Two young servants, whose features recalled that type of beauty so common on Syracusan moneys, were standing a little in the rear—low forehead, commingling with the brow, rather thick lips, strong and well-defined chin; the braids of bluish-black hair being fastened into a heavy coil, pierced with coral-mounted pins, while three rows of coral beads encircled their muscular necks. A dandy would have scorned to notice these poor girls whose red Grecian blood was free of all foreign taint, but an artist would have pulled out his sketch-book and sharpened his pencil with alacrity.

Have you ever seen that picture by Muril-

lo in Marechal Soult's gallery, representing a group of little cupids as they disport themselves about the kitchen fire? For if you have, it will spare us the trouble of painting the heads of the three or four curly-headed pot-boys who completed the group.

This trio, surrounded by the pot-boys and the scullion maids, were discussing a serious question. They were talking of M. Paul d'Aspremont, the young French traveller, who had arrived by the last steamer. Those in the kitchen considered it their duty to criticise their betters.

Timberio had the floor, and he rested between every sentence to note the effect produced on his audience.

"Now I want you to carefully note what I have to say," began the orator; "the *Leopold* is an honest craft, flying the flag of Tuscany. The only fault to be found against her is that she transports too many English heretics—"

"The English heretics pay well, however," interrupted Scazziga, who had received many a tip from the British tourists.

"Undoubtedly; but then the best thing a heretic can do is to pay a Christian liberally to compensate him for the disgrace of serving an unbeliever."

"I don't consider it a disgrace at all to drive a heretic in my carriage; I don't make

a pack-horse of myself like you, Timberio, any way."

"Was I not baptized 'ust the same as you?" retorted the portei, with an angry scowl as he doubled up his fists.

"Let Timberio have his say!" cried out the others as in one voice, fearing that these personal recriminations would wind up in a scuffle.

"You will agree," continued the orator, thoroughly pacified as he knew popular favor was on his side, "that the weather was superb when the *Leopold* entered port?"

"We admit all that, Timberio," remarked the *chef*, as he waved his hand majestically in token of acquiescence.

"The sea was as smooth as glass," continued the *facchino*, "and yet an enormous wave suddenly came up and upset Gennaro's bark, spilling the captain and three of his men into the water. Now, I ask you, is this natural? Gennaro is a regular sea-dog; he could dance the tarentella on the crest of a wave without a balancing pole, and yet his bark is upset in a dead calm."

"He may have drunk a flask of *asprimo* too much," objected Scazziga, the rationalist of the assembly.

"Not even a glass of lemonade," Timberio hastened to reply; "but a gentlemar.

on board the steamer looked at him in a peculiar manner—do you hear?”

“Oh, perfectly!” replied the chorus, extending their middle and little fingers as if moved by a string.

“And this gentlemen,” added Timberio, “was no other but M. Paul d’Aspremont.”

“The guest who occupies number 3?” inquired the *chef*; “the one who takes his meals in his room?”

“Precisely,” replied the youngest and the prettiest of the servants; “I have never seen such a disagreeable or such a surly traveller before; he would not even give me a look, or say a single word, and yet all the tourists who stop here say I deserve a compliment even if I do not deserve a tip.”

“You deserve more than that, Gelsomina, my love,” gallantly remarked Timberio; “but it is fortunate indeed that the stranger did not notice you.”

“How superstitious you are, to be sure,” objected Scazziga, whom constant association with foreigners had made more or less sceptical.

“If you keep on associating with heretics you will wind up by no longer believing in Saint Januarius himself.”

“If Gennaro was so clumsy as to fall overboard, that is no reason why M. Paul d’As-



premont should possess the evil influence you attribute to him," continued Scazziga, defending his customer.

"I will give you other proofs: this morning I saw him standing near the window, his eye fixed on a little cloud no larger than Gelsomina's cap, and a moment later a mass of thick vapors gathered over the city and the rain came down so hard that the dogs could drink out of the gutter without stooping."

Scazziga was as doubtful as ever, and he shook his head as if to say that he didn't credit Timberio's idle fears in the least.

"Besides, the valet is not worth any more than the master," continued the latter; "and I am sure the little hump-backed monkey must be in league with the devil to be able to overthrow me — Timberio — who could knock him over with the flat of my hand!"

"I share Timberio's opinions," chimed in the *chef* in a patronizing sort of way; "the stranger eats but little; he sent back some fried chicken and some macaroni I had prepared with my own hands! Some mysterious secret is hidden beneath this abstinence. Why should a rich man deprive himself of the good things of this world in order to partake of a bouillon and a slice of cold meat?"

"He has red hair," said Gelsomina, as she passed her hand through her long curls.

“And projecting eyes,” added Pepina, the other servant.

“Very close to his nose,” insisted Timberio.

“And the wrinkle which assumes the form of a horse-shoe between his eye-glasses,” remarked the formidable Virgilio Falsacappa; “therefore he is a—”

“Do not pronounce the name, it is unnecessary,” they all exclaimed with the exception of Scazziga; “we will be on our guard.”

“It makes my blood boil when I think that the police would arrest me if, by accident, I let a three-hundred-pound trunk fall on the head of this unbeliever—of this forerunner of danger,” raved Timberio, bringing his fist down upon the table in his rage.

“Scazziga must be plucky to drive him,” now ventured Gelsomina.

“I am on my box, he can only see my back, so his eyes can't fix themselves upon mine in the right angle. Besides, I don't bother my head about all this humbug!”

“You have no faith, Scazziga,” said Palforio, the colossal pastry-cook; “you will come to a bad end.”

While he was thus being discussed in the kitchen of the Hotel de Rome, Paul, whom the presence of the Comte d'Altavilla at Miss Ward's had put in a bad humor, had gone for

a stroll in the Villa Reale ; and the wrinkle in his forehead grew larger and his eyes assumed their queer expression more than once as he walked up and down the lava pavement. At one moment he thought he saw Alicia and the Comte driving by in a carriage; he rushed up to the vehicle and peered through the open window, but it was not Alicia—only a woman who resembled her slightly at a distance. However, the horses, taking fright at Paul's sudden appearance, ran off, almost upsetting the carriage.

Paul took an ice in the Café de l'Europe : a number of persons examined him attentively and then changed their seats, nodding their heads in a knowing manner.

He entered the theatre of Pulcinella, where they were giving a *tutto da ridere*. The principal actor forgot his lines ; after a moment's hesitation, however, he went on with his part ; but in the last act of the pantomime his false nose fell off, and, when he attempted to apologize and explain the cause of his misfortunes his tongue suddenly refused to move, as Paul's eyes fastened themselves upon his and deprived him of the power of speech.

Those who were seated near Paul rose in a body and changed their stalls. M. d'Aspremont rose to go, without having noticed the strange effect his presence had produced ;

while in the lobby he heard the spectators whisper to one another as he passed by :

“ A jettatore ! A jettatore ! ”

## CHAPTER VI.

THE day after he had sent the horns, Comte d'Altaville called upon Miss Ward. The young girl was taking afternoon tea in company with her uncle, precisely as if she had been in a red-brick house at Ramsgate, instead of on a plastered terrace in Naples, surrounded by cactus, fig-trees and aloes. It is a characteristic peculiarity of the Saxon race, never to adapt its insular habits to novel surroundings.

The Commodore was in unusual good humor. By means of a chemical apparatus he had succeeded in turning out a cake of ice, and, in this manner, had continued to keep his butter solid. He was buttering a slice of bread with great gusto, preparatory to transforming it into a sandwich.

After the formalities of a first greeting, Alicia, unmindful of the abrupt manner in which it was done, suddenly changed the conversation, and turning towards the young Neapolitan Comte, asked :

- “ What is the significance of the strange

gift which accompanied your flowers? Vicè, my servant, pretends that it is a talisman against the *fascino*; but this is all the satisfaction she would give me."

"Vicè is very sensible," replied the Comte Altavilla, bowing politely.

"But what is the *fascino*?" continued the young lady; "I am not very well acquainted with your African superstitions—for I presume the word designates some popular belief?"

"The *fascino* is the pernicious influence exercised by those who possess—or rather those who are afflicted—with the evil eye."

"Pardon me," remarked Miss Ward, "but I really do not understand you; the meaning of *the evil eye* is as mysterious to me as that of *fascino*."

"I will attempt to explain to the best of my ability," replied d'Altavilla; "but, as you are sceptical like all Englishwomen, I presume you will at once jump at the conclusion that I am a savage and that my clothes conceal a skin tattooed in blue and red. I am, however, perfectly civilized; I was educated in Paris, and I speak both French and English; I have read Voltaire; I believe in telegraphy, electricity and railroads; I eat macaroni with a fork, and I wear three different pairs of gloves every day."

The Commodore, who was busily engaged in buttering his second sandwich, was now all attention, his curiosity having been aroused by d'Altavilla's strange introduction.

"Now that you have showed yourself in your true colors," laughingly remarked Miss Ward, "I would be sceptical indeed were I to suspect you of *barbarism*. But that which you wish to explain must indeed be either very terrible or very ridiculous or you would not beat about the bush in this way—"

"Yes, it is very terrible, and, as you say very ridiculous," continued the Comte; "and if I were in Paris or London I might possibly share your mirth and laugh with you, but here, in Naples—"

"It is far more serious; and, I suppose, you cannot even smile?"

"Precisely."

"Then kindly enlighten me as to the meaning of *fascino*," said Miss Ward, who was impressed by the Neapolitan's determined manner.

"This superstition is as old as the world. It is alluded to in the Bible; Virgil speaks of it in most decided terms, and the bronze medals found at Pompeii and Herculaneum, and the unmistakable signs on the walls of the un-earthed houses clearly prove how universal this *superstition* was. The people of the East still

believe in it at the present day. Red and green bands are painted on the side of Moorish buildings in order to protect the inhabitants from the evil spirit. A sculptured hand is plainly seen on the door of Judgment of the Alhambra. All this certainly denotes the antiquity of the superstition, even if it has no foundation. When millions of men have shared this opinion during thousands of years, it stands to reason that such a general belief must be founded on actual facts and a succession of actual events. I scarcely imagine that the eminent *savants* who have written treatises on the subject, would have made known their opinions to the world unless they had positive facts with which to prove their assertions."

"Your argument is certainly open to criticism," interrupted Miss Ward; "for polytheism was Homer's, Plato's, Aristotle's and Socrates' religion. The latter even went so far as to sacrifice a rooster to Esculapius."

"I admit all that, but at the present time no one sacrifices bullocks to Jupiter."

"I should hope not!" interrupted the Commodore; "they are sensible enough to serve them up as rump and beefsteaks, instead of wasting them upon the desert air!"

"No one offers doves to Venus, peacocks to Juno, or goats to Bacchus; Christianity

has replaced the poetic dreams of Greek mythology ; truth has triumphed over superstition, and still there are thousands of people who dread the fatal effects of the *fascino*, or to give it the popular name, the *jettatura*."

"I can readily understand that people of low origin should permit themselves to be influenced by this idle superstition, but I cannot imagine how a man of your education and position can place faith in such nonsense," remarked Miss Ward.

"More than one man of high standing hangs a pair of horns over his window," continued the Comte, "and nails a sacrifice over his door, while he never ventures forth without being covered with amulets and charms ; and I admit that, whenever I meet a *jettatore* I hurry across the street, and, if I cannot avoid his glance, I do not hesitate to make the sign of the cross, as any *lazzarone* would do ; and I flatter myself that I have escaped their fatal influence, thanks to this precaution."

Miss Ward was a Protestant, brought up with liberal ideas, and she was not accustomed to believe anything which had not been explained to her entire satisfaction. The Comte's eloquence surprised her. At first she supposed he was only jesting, but his earnest manner and the calm conviction with



which he spoke soon caused her to change her views.

“ I will admit the existence of this superstition,” she replied ; “ I also believe you are sincere in your fear of the evil eye and that you are not trying to work on the fears of a poor stranger ; but kindly give me some positive proof of the existence of this superstition, for, though you may think me devoid of poetic feeling, I assure you that I am very incredulous, and whatever is mysterious, inexplicable, or occult impresses me very little.”

“ You will not deny, Miss Alicia,” continued the Comte, “ the power of the human eye ; in it the light of heaven combines with the reflection of the soul ; the eye-ball is a lens which concentrates the rays of life and the intellect reflects itself in it as in a mirror. A woman’s loving glance softens the hardest heart ; a hero’s glance arouses the enthusiasm of an army, and the glance of a physician calms the madman like a shower of cold water. A mother’s look will even make a lion recoil before her.”

“ You plead your cause with so much eloquence,” interrupted Miss Ward, “ that you must pardon me if I am still doubtful.”

“ And the bird, which, palpitating with fear and uttering plaintive cries, descends from the topmost branch of a tree, from whence it

could easily have flown away, to throw itself into the open mouth of the serpent that has charmed it, is certainly not moved by superstition, as it is not probable that the mothers entertain their young with stories of the jettatura as they sit aloft in their little nests. Then, again, are the miasmas of typhoid fever, of that pest, cholera, visible? No mortal eye can perceive the electric fluid as it runs down the lightning-rod, and yet it attracts the lightning!

“It strikes me that the Comte’s theory is not so untenable after all,” interrupted the Commodore; “I never could look at a toad’s golden eyes without feeling revulsion; it acts on me exactly as if I had taken an emetic; and yet the miserable reptile had more to fear than I, who could have crushed it beneath the heel of my boot.”

“Oh, uncle! if you take sides with M. d’Altavilla I shall have to acknowledge myself defeated,” exclaimed Miss Ward. “I am not strong enough to struggle against such opposition. Although I might have many objections to raise against this ocular electricity, on the grounds that no physician has ever mentioned it in his thesis, still I am willing to admit its existence; but will you please inform me what power the pair of horns you so kindly sent me, have to divert

the fatal effects of the *fascino*, or *jettatura*, as you call it?"

"On the same principle that the point of the lightning-rod attracts the lightning," answered d'Altavilla; "the sharp points of the horns on which the *jettatore* fixes his eyes will divert the fatal fluid. An outstretched hand or a bunch of coral charms has the same effect."

"All this is very stupid, Monsieur le Comte," remarked Miss Ward; "you evidently desire to impress me with the idea that I am under the influence of some dangerous *fascino* or *jettatore*, and you have sent me the horns in order to divert their fatal influence."

"I fear you have guessed the truth, Miss Alicia," replied the Comte earnestly.

"I'd like to see one of those goggle-eyed fellows trying to charm my niece!" exclaimed the Commodore, bolting his third sandwich. "Although I have passed my sixtieth year, I haven't quite forgotten how to use my fists," and he doubled up his digits, firmly pressing his thumb against his doubled fingers.

"Two fingers are sufficient, my lord," said d'Altavilla, as he showed the Commodore how to keep away the evil spirit in the most approved Neapolitan style. "As a rule, the

*jettatura* is practised involuntarily ; it is only exercised by those who possess the fatal power, and frequently when the *jettatori* realize their terrible affliction, they deplore the effects even more than others ; we should, therefore, avoid these unhappy beings, but not persecute them. Besides, one can neutralize their fatal influence with a pair of horns, outstretched fingers, or a bunch of coral charms."

"It is really very curious," said the Commodore, who was partly convinced by d'Altavilla's impressive calmness.

"I did not know that I came so constantly in contact with these *jettatori*. I rarely leave this terrace unless it is to take a drive along the Villa Reale with my uncle, and I have never noticed anything like what you have described," said the young girl, whose curiosity was now aroused, although she was still as doubtful as before. "Of whom are you suspicious?"

"I am not suspicious, Miss Ward ; I am positive of what I assert," replied the young Neapolitan.

"Then, for pity's sake, tell us the name of this fatal being?" exclaimed Miss Ward, rather sarcastically.

But d'Altavilla was silent.

“It is always well to know whom to guard against,” added the Commodore.

The young Comte reflected for a moment ; then he rose, and approaching the Commodore, he bowed politely and said :

“Milord Ward, I have the honor to ask the hand of your niece.”

At this unexpected request Alicia blushed to the roots of her dark hair, and from red the Commodore turned to scarlet.

The Comte d'Altavilla certainly had a right to aspire to the hand of Miss Ward ; he belonged to one of the oldest and most noble families in Naples ; he was handsome, young, wealthy, in favor at court, highly educated, and of irreproachable manners. He was therefore perfectly justified in making this proposal ; but it was the abrupt and unexpected manner in which it was made which took the Commodore and his niece by surprise. But d'Altavilla did not appear the least discouraged or disconcerted, although he awaited the answer with a palpitating heart.

“After the Commodore had partly recovered from his surprise he turned to the Comte and said :

“My dear d'Altavilla, I must confess that while I am highly honored by your proposal, it has taken me by surprise. Upon my

word, I don't know what to say; I have not even consulted my niece. You were speaking of *fascinos*, *jettaturi*, horns, charms, open and closed fingers, and of a host of other things which are in no wise connected with marriage, and the next moment you take my breath away by asking for Alicia's hand! All this appears very strange, and you must pardon me if I seem a little at sea. Such a union would be very proper, I am sure, but I imagine my niece has other intentions. It is true that such an old sea-dog as I am can't read a young girl's heart, but I think I'm about right, when—"

At this moment, Alicia, seeing that her uncle was getting mixed up, came to his rescue and at the same time put an end to a scene which was becoming embarrassing.

"When an honest man asks for the hand of a young girl, Comte, she has no right to take offence, but she certainly has the right to be surprised at the strange manner in which the request is made. I requested you to disclose the name of this pretended *jettatore* whose fatal influence you claim is dangerous to me, and you suddenly change the subject by asking my uncle to honor you with the hand of his niece in marriage—I really cannot understand your motive for so doing."

"It is because a nobleman does not care to

turn informer," replied Altavilla, "and because a husband alone has the right to protect his wife. But take your time to make up your mind. I can afford to wait a few days for your answer, and, until then, the horns, if properly exposed, will protect you against all fatal influences."

And with a profound bow, the Comte took his departure.

Vicè, the fawn-colored servant with the matted hair, who had come on the terrace to remove the tea-pot and the cups, had overheard the latter part of the conversation. She despised Paul d'Aspremont with all the aversion which a peasant of the Abruzzi, hardly civilized by two or three years of servitude, can have for an unbeliever suspected of *jettatura*; on the other hand, she looked upon the Comte d'Altavilla as a sort of Adonis, and she could not understand how it was that Miss Ward preferred a pale and sickly looking young man, whom she, Vicè, would not have condescended to notice even if he had not had an evil eye. Besides, she could not conceive the delicate motives which prompted the Comte to act as he had done, and in the hope of protecting her mistress, whom she dearly loved, from impending evil, Vicè leaned over towards Miss Ward as she whispered in her ear :

“I can tell you the name the Comte d’Altavilla refused to disclose.”

“I forbid you to mention it, Vicè, if you care for me at all,” replied Alicia. “Such superstition is positively disgraceful, and I will brave it like a Christian maiden who has nothing to fear but her God.”

## CHAPTER VII.

“JETTATORE! Jettatore! These words were certainly addressed to me,” muttered Paul d’Aspremont to himself as he returned to the hotel. “I don’t know what they mean, but they certainly mean something injurious or ridiculous. What is there about me to attract attention? I believe, even if I say it myself, that I am neither handsome nor ugly, neither tall nor short, thin nor stout, and that I could pass unnoticed in a crowd. There is nothing at all eccentric in my dress; I do not wear a turban illuminated with candles like M. Jourdain in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*; neither do I wear a waistcoat embroidered with the rising sun; a nigger does not precede me with a pair of cymbals: my individuality, which is unknown in Naples, any way, is concealed beneath an ordinary suit, and I am not at all different in appearance



from any of the swells who stroll along the Rue de Tolède, or on the largo of the palace, unless it be a little less cravat, a little less scarf-pin, a little less embroidered shirt-front, a little less waistcoat, a little less watch-chain, and considerably less curls.

“Perhaps my hair isn’t properly frizzed! To-morrow I will have the barber do my hair up in crimps, as ladies do. And yet, strangers are not curiosities here, and a slight difference in dress would scarcely justify the mysterious word and the strange gesture my presence provokes. I have also noticed an expression of antipathy and fear, in the eyes of the people who recoil from me at my approach. How can I possibly have offended these persons, whom I have never met before? A passing tourist never excites any other feeling than that of indifference, unless he comes from a far-off clime or is a specimen of an unknown race; but the steamer unloads hundreds of just such tourists as I am every week, and who bothers his head about them except the facchini and the hotel-keepers? I have not killed my brother, since I never had a brother to kill, and therefore cannot bear the mark of Cain on my forehead—and yet strong men tremble and recoil at my approach. I never produced such an effect either in Paris, Lon-

non, Vienna or any of the cities I have visited; sometimes I have been accused of being too proud; I have been told that I affect the English *sneer*, and that I imitate Lord Byron, but I have always received the welcome accorded a gentleman, and my advances, although a rare occurrence, were invariably appreciated. A three-days sea voyage from Marseilles to Naples certainly cannot have changed my appearance so as to render me hideous or grotesque in the eyes of the ladies, who, I flatter myself, were always favorably impressed with me—were it otherwise I never could have won the love of Alicia Ward, a charming young girl, a celestial creature—one of Tom Moore's angels!"

It was very late. With the exception of Paul, all the other guests had already retired. Gelsomina, one of the servants who took part in the discussion in the kitchen of the hotel between Scazziga and Timberio, was awaiting his arrival to lock up for the night. Nanella, the other girl, whose night on it was, begged Gelsomina to take her place, as she was afraid to meet the man suspected of being a *jettatore*. Gelsomina was well prepared for the meeting—an enormous bunch of charms was suspended around her neck, while two little coral horns dangled from her shapely ears, and the index of her right hand was

pointed at the intruder in a manner, which would undoubtedly have won the approbation of M. Andrea de Jorio, author of the *Mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire napoletano*.

The courageous girl, concealing her right hand beneath a fold of her dress, presented a light to M. d'Aspremont with her left, while the piercing, almost defiant, look she directed upon him compelled the young man to lower his eyes,—a victory which appeared to greatly please Gelsomina.

After the traveller had gone up-stairs, and the noise of his footsteps was no longer heard, Gelsomina raised her head with a triumphant air, as she said to herself: "I made him lower his eyes, all the same; may Saint Januarius confound him, he is a bad man; but I am sure no harm will come to me now."

Paul slept badly; he was tormented with curious dreams relating to the strange events which had transpired during the past twenty-four hours: he imagined himself surrounded by a group of scowling, threatening faces, on which hatred, anger, and fear were plainly depicted; then the faces disappeared; long, skinny, bony fingers, with horny knuckles, were pointed at him in the darkness, threatening him with cabalistic gestures. The nails

of these hands, resembling the talons of a vulture, seemed to menace the destruction of his eyesight. By a superhuman effort he succeeded in thrusting aside these hands; but they were immediately replaced by a heap of horned heads of different animals, which charged upon him and attempted to drive him into the sea, where his body was torn to shreds on a jagged coral reef; a wave carried him back to the shore, torn and disfigured and more dead than alive; and, like Byron's Don Juan, he perceived, while in a trance, the face of a young woman leaning over him—it was not Haidée, but Alicia, more beautiful even than the fair creature painted by the poet. The young girl was making desperate efforts to draw the inanimate body on the sands, and when she asked Vicè, the dark-skinned servant, to lend her a helping hand, the latter refused with a coarse laugh: finally Alicia's arms were deprived of their strength, and a retreating wave washed him out to sea.

These frightful dreams tormented the sleeper until the break of day, and Paul arose with anxiety, as if some terrible secret had been revealed to him during his sleep. He closed his eyes to shut out the truth; for the first time life seemed a burden to him. He even doubted Alicia; the Comte d'Al-

tavilla's contented air, the attention with which the young girl listened to his song, the Commodore's approving smile,—all this recurred to him, embellished with a hundred minute details, filling his heart with sorrow and adding still more to the feeling of melancholy which had taken possession of him.

The sunlight has the power to dispel all nocturnal visions, and the demon of darkness spread out his wings and disappeared with the first rays of the rising sun. It was soon shining brightly in the clear sky, reflecting its golden rays on the blue sea, which was as clear as crystal. Paul slowly recovered his equanimity; he soon forgot the frightful dreams and the curious impression caused by his appearance the night before, or, if he thought of them at all, it was with a smile at their extravagance.

He took a stroll to Chiaja to while away the time, and amused himself by gazing at the Neapolitans as they hurried to their work; the merchants were calling out their wares for sale in the quaint dialect of the country, unintelligible to Paul, who did not speak Italian, with those excited gestures which are unknown to the children of a Northern clime; but every time he halted in front of a shop, the proprietor, instead of appearing pleased at the prospect of dis-

posing of some of his stock, assumed a terrified air, as he murmured an invocation in a low tone, and pointed his finger at the intruder; while the gossips and old hags who infest Chiaja were even still more rude in their actions, and showered the vilest epithets upon him as they shook their fists at him.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

ON hearing the jeers and curses of the people of Chiaja, M d'Aspremont believed that he was the victim of the vulgar custom of ridiculing and guying well-dressed gentlemen who pass through the fish-market; but the disgust and fright they evinced was so marked that he soon realized that this was not the case; the word *jettatore*, which had already reached his ears in the theatre of San Carlino, was repeated here on every side, only this time those who pronounced it were more threatening in their manner; so he walked away slowly, carefully avoiding to fix eyes which were the cause of so much trouble, on any one. On his way, Paul passed a bookstore; he halted before it, and began to fumble the leaves of the exposed volumes for want of something better to do; in this manner his back was turned upon the passing throng, and.

with his eyes fixed upon the pages of the books, he avoided attracting its attention. At one moment he was tempted to charge upon the crowd and pay them for their insolence with a shower of blows with his cane, but he refrained from doing so, influenced by a vague, superstitious terror. He remembered how he once had struck an impudent coachman with his cane and had unhappily hit him on the temple, killing him instantly; this involuntary murder constantly haunted Paul, and warned him against violence.

After having examined a large number of books his eyes suddenly fell upon the "*Jettatura*" of Signor Nicolo Valetta; the title of the book shone in his eyes in letters of fire, and it seemed to him as if the volume had been placed there by the hand of fate; he flung the price of the book at the shopkeeper, who was gazing at him in evident terror and toyed with a bunch of coral charms on his watch-chain. Hurrying to the hotel d'Aspremont locked himself in his room in order not to be interrupted in his perusal of the book, which, he expected, would enlighten him as to the meaning of the curious events which had transpired since his sojourn in Naples.

Signor Valetta's treatise on the evil spirit is as well known in Naples as the "*Secrets du grand Albert*," "*l'Etteila*," or "*La clef des*

*Songes*” are in Paris. Valetta defines the jettatura, explains how it can be identified by certain marks, and by what means one can protect himself against its fatal influence : he divides the jettatori into several distinct classes, arranging them in regular order in accordance with the power they possess, and discusses at great length all details connected with this curious question.

If he had picked this book up in Paris, d’Aspremont would merely have glanced over it in that careless manner with which one fumbles the leaves of an old almanac, and he would have heartily laughed at the serious manner in which the author treated this nonsense ; but in his present frame of mind, agitated as he was by a number of curious incidents, he read the book over with a feeling of horror. Although he did not attempt to penetrate its meaning, the secrets of hell were plainly revealed to him ; they were no longer a mystery to him, and he was now fully aware of the fatal power he possessed—he was a jettatore ! He was obliged to acknowledge it, for he had every symptom and mark by which Valetta identifies them.

It sometimes happens that a man who has always thought himself blessed with an iron constitution, accidentally opens a medical work, and, in reading the pathological des-



cription of a disease therein, suddenly recognizes the symptoms in his own system.; thus enlightened he feels, at the discovery of each fresh symptom, new evidence of its existence within himself, and he trembles at the seeming approach of a death he never dreamed of. Paul experienced just such an impression.

He placed himself before a mirror, and gazed at himself in awe-stricken terror: the incongruity of his appearance, composed as it was of perfect parts, which, as a rule, are not found in one person, made him look for all the world like the archangel after his expulsion from Paradise, and, as he stood there before the mirror, the fibres of his eyeballs wriggled like so many vipers; his eyebrows quivered like the bow which has just shot forth the poisoned arrow; the white furrow in his forehead resembled the white scar of a burn, while his auburn hair seemed to shed forth a reddish lustre not unlike the flames which are said to exist in hell, and the deadly pallor of his skin made every feature of his fiendish countenance stand out in bold relief.

Paul was afraid of himself. He imagined that the reflection of his eyes in the mirror was casting poisoned darts at him—picture to yourself Medusa gazing at her charming *but fearful countenance on the dull surface of* brass buckler.

Paul realized that he was a fiend in human form! Although endowed with noble and affectionate instincts, he carried misfortune wherever he went; his involuntary glance, charged with venom, brought suffering and misery to those on whom it rested. He possessed the fatal power to collect, concentrate and distil the dangerous electricity and morbid miasmas and other frightful infections of the atmosphere and hurl them broadcast upon those near him. A number of curious incidents in his past which he had always credited to chance alone were now clearly explained; he distinctly remembered all sorts of strange misadventures and accidents which he never could account for.

He recalled his life, year by year; he remembered his mother, who died in giving him birth; the sad fate of his schoolmates, the dearest of whom fell from a tree and was killed while Paul encouraged him to steal some apples; an excursion in a canoe which begun most auspiciously with two of his comrades, and from which he alone returned, after the most frantic efforts to recover the bodies of the unfortunate lads who had fallen overboard; the fencing bout in which his foil broke off, transforming the foil into a sword, and in which he dangerously wounded his dearest friend—all these accidents were com-

mon enough, to be sure, and Paul had always looked upon them as such ; but he knew differently since he had perused Valetta's work, and he reasoned that the fatal influence of the jettatura certainly had a hand in all these misfortunes. Such a continuous number of accidents in connection with one person was *unnatural*.

Another incident, and of more recent date, recurred to him in all its horrible reality, and in no little wise assisted in convincing him that he was undoubtedly accursed.

While in London, he frequently went to Her Majesty's Theatre, where he was greatly impressed with the grace and talent of a young English *danseuse*. Without, however, being more infatuated with her than a man of the world is with one of the graceful figures contained in a painting or an engraving, he followed her movements, as she whirled about in the mazes of the ballet or charmed the spectators in a *pas seule*; it pleased him to gaze at the sad young face, which never flushed at the applause of the audience, her beautiful blonde hair, crowned with golden stars, the chaste white shoulders, which instinctively shivered under the opera-glasses which followed her movements, the shapely limbs which were plainly visible through the thin gauze skirt and which shone beneath

their silken covering like the marble of an antique statue ; each time she approached the footlights, he either loudly applauded her or raised his eyeglass in order to see the better.

One night, the *danseuse*, carried away by the momentum of the dance, came too near the glittering line of gas-jets which separated the ideal from the real world. Her slender draperies, fluttering like the wings of a dove about to take its flight, suddenly came in contact with a gas-jet, and the light material was soon ablaze. In a moment the flames enveloped the young girl, who ran about for a few seconds surrounded by a mass of fire ; then, turning around, she rushed madly towards the wings, where she fell down—another victim of that insatiable fiend, the fire king. Paul was deeply pained by this calamity, but he never felt any remorse, as he did not suppose he was in any way responsible for her death.

But he was now convinced that the obstinacy with which he had gazed at the *danseuse* had more or less to do with her untimely end. He looked upon himself as an assassin ; he was afraid of himself, and he wished that he had never been born.

A violent reaction followed this prostration ; he burst into a loud laugh and flung Valetta's book from him.

“Decidedly,” he exclaimed, “I am either a madman or a fool! The hot sun of Naples has probably affected my brain. What would the members of my club say if they heard that I was actually bothering my head with the absurd question—whether I am, yes or no,—a jettatore!”

Paddy knocked discreetly at the door. Paul drew the bolt, and the valet handed him a note with Miss Ward’s compliments.

M. d’Aspremont broke the seal and read as follows :

“Are you angry with me, Paul?—You did not call last evening, and your *sorbet au citron* melted in its cup while we waited for you. Until nine o’clock I listened attentively for the sound of your carriage-wheels; then I lost all hope, and I quarrelled with the Commodore. See how just women are! Undoubtedly, Pulcinella with his red nose, and Don Simon and Donna Pangrazia must be a great attraction, as my secret police have informed me that you passed last evening in the theatre at San Carlino. And you have not written a single one of those so-called *important* letters. Why not honestly confess that you are jealous of the Comte Altavilla? I thought you had more pride, and I am surprised at your modesty. You need have no fear, however. M. d’Altavilla is a great deal too handsome, and I do not fancy this Apollo with his bunch of coral charms. If I did what is considered proper I would write to say

that I have not even missed you ; but, since I must tell the truth, let me add that the time passed slowly without you, and that I have been extremely nervous and ill-humored ; I almost boxed Vicè's ears ; the girl was laughing away as if she had taken leave of her senses—but I really cannot say what has caused this unusual levity. A. W."

This humorous and sarcastic epistle brought Paul to his senses. He dressed in hot haste, ordered a carriage, and soon the doubtful Scazziga was snapping his whip as his horses galloped over the lava pavement and through the ever varying crowd on the quai of Santa-Lucia.

" I say, Scazziga, why all this hurry ? You will surely upset us ! " called out M. d'Aspremont. The coachman turned around to reply, and met Paul's furious glance. A stone he had not seen struck one of the wheels, knocking him clean off the box. Active as a monkey, he sprang back in his seat, but there was a big lump, as large as a hen's egg, in the middle of his forehead.

" I'll be hanged if I turn around the next time you have anything to say ! " he grumbled: " Timberio and Falsacappa were right—he is a jettatore ! I will buy myself a pair of horns to-morrow—they can't do any harm even if they don't do any good."

This little incident annoyed Paul ; he added

this last accident to the series of misfortunes with which he had been identified ; it is no unusual occurrence for a carriage to run against a stone, and a clumsy coachman frequently loses his seat. There was therefore nothing so very wonderful in this, after all. And yet, the *effect* had followed the *cause* so promptly, Scazziga's fall coincided so exactly with the *glance* he had given him, that all his doubts returned.

"I have half a mind to get out of this wonderful country," he said to himself. "I can feel my brain rattling in my head like a dried nut in its shell. But if I confided my fears to Alicia she would simply laugh at me, and the climate is favorable to her health. Her health ! why, she was strong and healthy when I first met her. And yet, before my very eyes, I have seen her growing thinner and thinner every day ! How her bright eyes become dimmed in my presence, and her shapely hand has fallen away at my touch ! One would suppose that consumption had already claimed her as its own. In my absence, she has regained her strength, the bloom has returned to her cheek, and her chest, which caused her physician no end of anxiety, has ceased to trouble her ; delivered of my fatal presence, she would live for years. Am I not killing her ? Have I not involun-

tarily cast the fascino's spell about her? But, after all, I can see no occasion for worryment, although she did have a bad spell the other evening; most English girls are subject to lung troubles."

These thoughts filled Paul's mind until the end of the journey. When he presented himself upon the terrace, the immense pair of Sicilian bull's horns presented by the Comte Altavilla was the first object to meet his view. Noticing that Paul had remarked them, the Commodore turned blue: that was his style of blushing, for, not so discreet as his niece, he had lent a friendly ear to Vicè.

Alicia, with an imperative gesture, motioned to the domestic to remove the horns, and fixing her lovely eyes, filled with love and confidence, on Paul, gave him a kindly welcome.

"Let them remain where they are," said Paul to Vicè; "they are very beautiful."

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## CHAPTER IX.

THE fact that Paul had condescended to notice the horns presented by the Comte Altavilla appeared to please the Commodore; while Vicè smiled, showing her white fangs, and Alicia, with a rapid glance, seemed to



question Paul without eliciting a reply in return.

A painful silence followed.

The first minutes of a visit, no matter how frequent the visitor may call or how intimate he may be, are always embarrassing. The Commodore was playing with his thumbs; d'Aspremont gazed fixedly at the horns which he had forbidden Vicè to remove, and Alicia pretended to tie the red bow of her white muslin wrapper.

It was Miss Ward who first broke the ice, with that freedom enjoyed by young English girls, so reserved and modest after marriage.

“ Really, Paul, you have been anything but agreeable during the past few days. Is your gallantry a rare hot-house flower which blooms only on English soil, or does the hot sun of Naples retard its development? How devoted, how attentive you were in our little home in Lincolnshire! You approached me with your hand on your heart, and with words of love on your lips, always prepared to fall on your knees before the idol of your dreams—in fact you were just such a model lover as one reads about in novels.”

“ I love you more than ever, Alicia,” replied d'Aspremont in a voice full of emotion, although he did not remove his eyes from the

horns, which hung on one of the pillars of the terrace.

“ You say it so mournfully that one must indeed be confident to believe it,” continued Miss Ward ; “ I rather imagine that what pleased you most was my diaphanous complexion, my sylph-like form and ethereal appearance ; my suffering gave me a certain romantic charm which I no longer possess.”

“ Alicia ! You are lovelier now than ever before ! ”

• “ Words, words, idle words, as Shakespeare says. I am so beautiful, in fact, that you do not condescend to notice me.”

And she spoke the truth ; Paul had not fixed his eyes upon her during the entire conversation.

“ Well,” she said with a deep sigh, “ I see that I have become a stout and awkward peasant, with a red, freckled face, without the slightest distinction, and totally unfit to figure at the county ball or in an album of celebrated beauties.”

“ Evidently, you delight in calumniating yourself, Miss Ward,” remarked Paul, with his eyes still lowered upon the ground.

“ You had much rather confess that I am horrible. And it is your fault, too, Commodore ; with your chicken-wings, your cutlets, your *filets de bœuf*, your little glass of Mad-

eira, your excursions on horseback, your salt water baths, and gymnastic exercises—you have succeeded in dispelling M. d'Aspremont's poetical illusions by transforming me into a strong, healthy girl."

"You are tantalizing M. d'Aspremont and you are guying me," replied the Commodore; "but, at all events, my *filets de bœuf* are strengthening, and a good glass of Madeira has never harmed any one."

"How disappointed you must be, my dear fellow! you leave a skeleton behind you, and you are confronted a few months later with what the physicians term a strong, well-constituted woman! Now, listen to me, since you haven't the courage to look for yourself, and hold up your hands in terror—I have gained seven pounds since I left England!"

"Eight pounds!" proudly interrupted the Commodore, who cared for Alicia with the tenderness of a mother.

"Are you quite sure that I have really gained as much as all that? I am sure you wish to disenchant M. d'Aspremont forever," remarked Alicia laughingly.

While the young girl was tantalizing him in this manner, Paul, who was now a firm believer in his fatal power, never permitted his eyes to rest upon her, and he either fixed them upon the talismanic horns or turned

them upon the broad expanse of water which could plainly be seen from the terrace.

He asked himself whether it was not his duty to desert Alicia, even though he passed for a man devoid of horror and faith, to go and end his days on some desert island where, at least, his fatal power would not strike down those with whom he came in contact.

“I know why you are so serious,” continued Alicia in the same jesting manner, “the date of our marriage has been arranged for next month; and you shudder at the thought of becoming the husband of a poor country girl, devoid of style or figure. Very well, then, I give you back your freedom—you are now at liberty to wed my friend Sarah Templeton, who eats pickles and drinks vinegar all day long in order to get thin!”

Then she burst into a hearty laugh, while the Commodore and Paul joined her.

When she finally realized that her sarcasm had no effect on d'Aspremont, she took him by the hand, and leading him to the piano, which was situated in a little arbor on the terrace, she remarked while she opened her music :

“I, see, my dear, that you are in no humor to talk to-day, so you will have to sing that

which you cannot say. You will therefore accompany me in this duettino, the music of which is very easy."

Paul seated himself on the stool, while Miss Ward stood up beside him in order to follow the notes of the song. The Commodore threw back his head, stretched out his legs, and assumed the attitude of an attentive listener, as was his wont on the pretence that he was an ardent admirer of Beethoven and Chopin, but he invariably fell fast asleep before the last note on the first sheet was reached, accompanying the singer with a series of loud snorts and snores.

The duettino was a bright and pleasing melody composed by Cimarosa, with words by Métastase, and, as it is said that music has the power to soothe the savage beast, it no doubt dispels evil spirits as well. In a few moments, Paul no longer thought of magic horns, conjurer's fingers, or coral charms ; he had completely forgotten Signor Valetta's book and all the superstitions of the jettatura. His mind was free from all such thoughts and his soul ascended lightly, together with Alicia's sweet voice, towards the bright sun.

The grasshoppers ceased their chirping in order to listen, while the brisk sea breeze carried away the notes together with the leaves

of the flowers which had fallen from the vases on the terrace.

“My uncle sleeps as soundly as did the seven giants in the cave. If it was not an old habit, our pride as virtuosos might possibly be ruffled,” remarked Alicia as she closed the piano. “While he is taking his *siesta*, will you take a stroll in the garden with me, Paul? I have not yet pointed out the charms of my Paradise to you.”

And she took down a large straw hat from the nail on which it was hanging.

Alicia professed to be decidedly original in horticulture ; she did not permit any one to pluck the flowers or trim the branches of the bushes ; and that which charmed her most when she first inspected the villa was the natural and wild state of the vegetation.

The young people forced their way through the dense underbrush. Alicia walked ahead, and she laughed merrily whenever the branches of a laurel-rose bush, displaced by her, would fly back and swish Paul across the face.

“Here is my favorite retreat, Paul,” said Alicia, pointing to a clump of picturesque rocks, protected by an overhanging mass of orange and myrtle leaves.

She seated herself on one of the rocks, and pointing to the moss-covered earth,

she requested Paul to kneel there at her feet.

"Now place your two hands in mine and look me straight in the face. In a month's time I will be your wife. Why do your eyes avoid mine?"

At this moment, Paul, whose mind was again filled with thoughts of the jettatura, turned his head aside.

"Are you afraid to read a guilty thought in my eyes? You know my heart has been yours since the first day you presented yourself with that letter of introduction in our parlor in Richmond. I belong to that proud, romantic and loving English race which, in a moment, conceives the love of a lifetime, and those who love thus are never afraid to die. Gaze into my eyes, Paul, I command you; do not turn aside your glance, or I shall begin to believe that a gentleman who should fear no one but his God is afraid of a vile superstition. Now turn your eyes upon me and judge for yourself whether I am pretty enough to take for a drive, in an open carriage in Hyde Park, after we are married."

Paul, carried away by her enthusiasm, fixed his eyes upon Alicia in a glance full of passionate love. Suddenly the young girl's face assumed a deathly pallor; a sharp pain pierced her heart like an arrow; it seemed as if some

fibre had parted in her bosom, and she raised her handkerchief to her lips. A drop of crimson blood stained the fine linen, but Alicia hastily folded the handkerchief as she murmured :

“ Oh, thanks, Paul ! You have made me so happy ! I thought you no longer loved me ! ”

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## CHAPTER X.

THE movement made by Alicia to conceal her handkerchief was not prompt enough, however, to escape M. d'Aspremont's notice ; a frightful pallor spread o'er Paul's features, for in this he perceived an irrefutable proof of his fatal power, and all sorts of strange thoughts flitted through his mind. Was it not his duty to put an end to himself as a public malefactor, the unconscious perpetrator of so much misery ? He would have willingly bent his form under the severest punishment and borne it without flinching, but the thought of depriving the one he loved above all else on earth of life, nearly made him frantic.

The brave girl had not given way to the painful sensation she experienced as Paul directed his eyes upon her—although it coin-



cided precisely with the Comte d'Altavilla's description. But, as we have said before, Alicia was not superstitious. Besides, were she convinced beyond all doubt of the existence of the *fascino* in Paul she would not have recoiled, and Miss Ward would have preferred to be stricken dead by a glance from the man she loved, rather than break her vow. Alicia resembled, in more ways than one, Shakespeare's determined heroines, whose love is pure and constant, and, when once pledged, is retained forever. She had pressed Paul's hand, and no other living man would ever hold her shapely hand in his. She considered herself pledged beyond recall, and would have shrunk from the idea of any other union.

Her gayety was, therefore, so natural or so well assumed, that she would have deceived the most attentive observer, and, bidding Paul who was still kneeling at her feet, to rise, she took his arm and led him through the wild and dense shrubbery of the garden until they reached a clearing through which they perceived the blue sea stretching out before them its calm, endless expanse. This beautiful vision dispersed all of Paul's sombre thoughts ; Alicia confidingly leaned upon his arm, as if she already considered herself his wife. The two lovers finally regained the terrace, where

the Commodore, still under the spell cast upon him by the music, was fast asleep in his bamboo chair. Paul took his departure, and Alicia, imitating the gestures of the Neapolitans, sent him a kiss on the tips of her fingers as she remarked: "Until to-morrow, dear Paul," in a voice full of tenderness and love.

"How beautiful you are to-day, Alicia!" suddenly remarked the Commodore, awakened from his nap, as he noticed the glowing color on his niece's cheek.

"You spoil me, uncle; and if I am not the vainest girl in the three kingdoms it is certainly no fault of yours. Fortunately I do not believe in flattery, even if it is disinterested."

"You are beautiful, dangerously beautiful," continued the Commodore, speaking to himself. "She reminds me of her mother, poor Nancy, who died on her nineteenth birthday. Such angels are not destined for this earth; at any moment wings are likely to make their appearance on their shoulders; they are too white, too pure, too perfect, the red blood of life is missing in these ethereal beings. The Almighty, who blesses the earth with their presence for a few years, seems impatient to regain possession of them. This dazzling beauty saddens my heart; it seems almost like the final parting."

“Well then, uncle, since I am so pretty it is high time for me to marry,” continued Miss Ward, who noticed the frown gathering on the Commodore’s brow; “the veil and the orange-blossoms would become me well, I fancy.”

“You wish to marry! Are you then so anxious to leave your old weather-beaten uncle, Alicia?”

“I will never leave you, since M. d’Aspremont agreed that we should all live together. You know perfectly well I could never bear to part from you.”

“M. d’Aspremont! M. d’Aspremont!—The wedding has not taken place, however—”

“Has he not your word—and mine? Sir Joshua Ward has never broken faith.”

“I admit that he has my word; there is no use denying that,” replied the Commodore, evidently embarrassed.

“And the six months’ limit you stipulated has expired—since a few days,” continued Alicia, with increasing color.

“Ah! so you have counted the months, my girl; you had better not place too much confidence in his discreet manner.”

“I love M. d’Aspremont,” replied the girl simply.

“This is the climax!” exclaimed Sir Joshua Ward, who imbued with Vicè’s and d’Alta-

villa's quaint notions, did not in the least like the idea of having a jettatore for a son-in-law.

"Why can't you have somebody else!"

"I have not two hearts," answered Alicia, "and I can have but one love, even though I were to die, like my mother, at nineteen."

"Don't talk such nonsense! the idea of mentioning death. I beg you to change the subject," implored the Commodore.

"Have you anything with which to reproach M. d'Aspremont?"

"Nothing—decidedly nothing."

"Has he forfeited his honor in any possible way? Has he ever shown himself to be a coward or a liar? Has he ever insulted a woman or recoiled before a man? Is his coat-of-arms tarnished by any secret taint? Can not a young girl take his arm in public without having to blush or lower her eyes?"

"M. Paul d'Aspremont is a perfect gentleman; no one can reproach him on that score."

"Believe me, uncle, when I assure you that if any such reason existed I would renounce him without the slightest hesitation, and would bury myself in some inaccessible retreat; but for no other reason, do you hear, will I break my word," added Miss Ward, in a gentle though determined tone.

The Commodore toyed with his thumbs, an

invariable habit of his when he was at a loss what to say.

“Why are you so cold to Paul?” continued Miss Ward; “formerly, you were so fond of him; why, you couldn’t get along without him in your house at Lincolnshire, and you used to tell him, while you nearly squeezed his fingers into a jelly, that he was a worthy lad and that you would willingly confide the happiness of a young girl to his keeping.”

“Why, of course, I loved Paul,” said the Commodore, evidently moved by these recollections; “but that which is obscure in the English fog becomes as clear as daylight in the sun of Naples—”

“What do you mean?” asked Alicia, trembling in spite of herself, while the color fled from her cheeks, leaving her white as marble.

“I mean that your Paul is possessed — he is a jettatore.”

“What! you! my uncle; you, Sir Joshua Ward, a nobleman, a Christian, a subject of Her British Majesty, a former officer in the English navy, an enlightened and civilized being, whom one would not hesitate to question on any subject—you who are wise and highly educated, you who read the Bible and the Gospel every night—you do not hesitate

to accuse Paul of being a jettatore ! Oh ! I never expected this from *you* !”

“ My dear Alicia,” replied the Commodore, “ as long as you are not concerned, I may be all you claim, but when a danger — even an imaginary danger, do you understand — threatens you, I become more superstitious than a peasant of the Abruzzes, a lazzarone of Chiaja, or even a Neapolitan comte. Paul can look at me as long as he has a mind to with his fatal eyes, I will remain as calm as if facing the point of a sword or the barrel of a pistol. The fascino won’t take on my tough hide, tanned by all the suns of the universe. I am only credulous on your account, dear Alicia, and I confess that I feel a cold perspiration dampening my forehead everytime the unfortunate lad turns his eyes upon you. He has no evil intentions, I know, and he loves you dearer than life itself, but it seems to me that, under his influence, your features change, your color disappears, and that you attempt to conceal a terrible pain ; and then I am seized with a furious desire to dig out the eyes of your Paul d’Aspremont with the point of the horns presented by d’Altavilla.”

“ My poor, dear uncle,” said Alicia, deeply moved by this sudden outburst on the part of the old Commodore ; “ our lives are in the

hands of God ; not a prince expires on his royal couch, not a beggar dies on his humble cot, but his time has been marked in heaven ; the fascino is powerless to do bodily injury, and it is a crime for us to believe that a peculiar look can exert evil influence upon us. Now you know perfectly well, uncle, you were not speaking seriously a moment ago ; your love for me, no doubt, affected your judgment. Am I not right ? Now, you would not dare tell M. d'Aspremont that you would withdraw the hand of your niece after you had placed it within his, and that you no longer desired him as a son-in-law, on the absurd plea that he was—a jettatore !”

“ By Joshua, my patron saint, who stopped the sun in its course !” exclaimed the Commodore ; “ I would not hurt the feelings of your pretty M. Paul for anything. But what matters it to me whether I appear ridiculous, absurd, or unloyal, when your health, your life perhaps, is at stake ! I gave your hand in wedlock to a man, not to a charmer. I pledged my word ; well, then, I will retract my promise—that’s all ! and if he isn’t satisfied, I will give him all the satisfaction he desires !”

And the Commodore, exasperated beyond measure, made an imaginary thrust, as if he was attacking an adversary, heedless of the

fact that he was suffering from a severe attack of gout.

“ Pardon me, Sir Joshua Ward, but you would never do that,” calmly remarked Alicia.

The Commodore seated himself in his bamboo chair, all out of breath, and remained silent.

“ Well then, uncle, even though this frightful accusation were true, would it be honorable to abandon M. d’Aspremont when he is guilty of a misfortune and not of a crime? Are you not aware that the harm he might cause would not be occasioned by his will, and that you have never seen a more noble, generous, or loving disposition in man before?”

“ One does not marry a vampire—no matter how good the brute’s intentions may be,” grumbled the Commodore.

“ But all this is chimerical, absurd, and superstitious; what is worse, however, is that Paul has become alarmed at this superstition, and he is afraid of himself; he believes in his fatal power, and every little accident convinces him that he is correct in this supposition. Is it not my duty, I who am his wife in the eyes of Heaven, and who will soon be his in the eyes of the world—blessed by you, dear uncle—to calm this excited imagi-



nation, to chase away these phantoms, to allay by kind words this wild anxiety, and thus save from destruction this noble soul?"

"You are always right, Alicia," replied the Commodore, "and I, whom you have just called wise, am only an old madman. I believe that this Vicè is a witch, and that she has turned my head with all her nonsense. As to the Comte d'Altavilla, with his horns and his collection of coral charms, he strikes me as being a fool. No doubt, it was a stratagem on his part to get Paul out of the way in order to win you himself."

"It may be that the Comte d'Altavilla acted as he did in perfectly good faith," remarked Alicia with a smile; "only a short time ago, you shared his opinions on the jettatura."

"Do not abuse your advantage, Miss Alicia; besides, I have not so fully recovered from my mistake that I may not err again. The wisest thing, in my estimation, would be to leave Naples by the first steamer and return quietly to England. When Paul will not have bull's horns, deer antlers, coral charms, extended fingers, and all those devilish arrangements constantly before him, he will recover his former peace of mind, while I will forget this unearthly business, which almost made me break my word and commit an action unworthy of a gentleman. Since it

has been so arranged, you will marry Paul. You will reserve the parlor and the ground floor of the house in Richmond for me, and the left wing in the castle in Lincolnshire, and we will all live happily together in England. If your health requires a warmer climate, we will rent a country seat at Cannes, where Lord Brougham's beautiful place is situated, and where, thank Heaven! this superstition relating to the jettatura is unknown. What do you think of my plan, Alicia?"

"It does not require my approval; am I not the most obedient of nieces?"

"Yes—when I do what you want me to do, you little minx," laughingly remarked the Commodore as he entered the villa.

Alicia remained on the terrace a few minutes longer; but whether this scene had affected her to such a degree, or whether Paul had really exercised his fearful power on the young girl, the warm breeze chilled her through and through, and at night, as she was feeling uncomfortable, she requested Vicè to wrap up her feet, which were as white and cold as marble, in one of those pretty knitted robes they make in Venice.

However, the glow-worms glittered among the shrubbery and the crickets chirped, while the yellow moon ascended the sky in a haze of light and heat.

## CHAPTER XI

THE day following that on which the scene recorded above took place, Alicia, who had passed a miserable night, scarcely touched the potion Vicè gave her every morning, and placed it carelessly on the stand by the side of the bed. While she did not feel any pain in particular, she was completely worn out. She requested Vicè to give her a hand-glass, for a young girl worries more about the alteration of her features caused by illness than about the malady itself. She was deathly pale, with the exception of two little red spots, however, looking for all the world like a couple of red rose-leaves in a bowl of milk. Her eyes shone with unwonted brilliancy, lighted by the remaining sparks of a burning fever ; but the bright red of her lips was not as pronounced as usual, and, in order to restore their accustomed color, she bit them with her white teeth.

She arose from her couch, and enveloped herself in a dressing-gown of white cashmere, winding the gauze scarf around her neck, for although the crickets chirped in the warmth outside, she felt chilly, and she made her appearance on the terrace at the accustomed hour in order not to arouse her uncle's sus-

picious. She partook of a slight repast, although she was not hungry at all, for the faintest indication of an indisposition would have been accredited to Paul's evil influence, and this was precisely what Alicia wished to avoid.

Then, excusing herself on the plea that the bright sun was too strong for her, she retired to her room, not, however, before assuring her uncle that she had never felt better in all her life.

"I hardly believe that," the Commodore muttered to himself after she had retired; "she has a couple of bright spots near the eyes, just like her mother, who also pretended to have never felt better in all her life. What's to be done? To get Paul out of the way would only hasten her death; I must let Nature have its way. Alicia is so young! But it is just such young people that grim Death craves for; he is as jealous as a woman. Possibly I had better send for a physician,—although of what use is medicine to an angel? And yet, all the symptoms had disappeared. Ah! if it should be you, accursed Paul, whose breath thus destroys this divine flower, I would strangle you with my own hands. Nancy was not under the influence of the jettatore, and yet she died.—What if Alicia should die! No, it is not possible.

I have not offended the Almighty in any possible way that He should reserve such a terrible punishment for me. When that comes to pass, I shall have already been sleeping for many years in my native village under a stone inscribed, *Sacred to the memory of Sir Joshua Ward*. It is she who will go and pray on the moss-covered grave of the old Commodore. I don't know what's the matter with me, but I am as blue and melancholy as old Harry himself this morning !”

In order to dispel these unpleasant thoughts, the commodore added a little more Jamaica rum to his cold tea, and sent for his houka, an innocent recreation which he only permitted himself in the absence of Alicia, whose delicate constitution would not have supported even this light smoke mingled with perfumes.

He had already boiled the aromatic water, and had blown three or four bluish clouds towards the sky, when Vicè announced the Comte d'Altavilla.

“Sir Joshua,” said the Comte after the usual formalities, “have you thought over my request of the other day ?”

“I have thought it over, Comte,” replied the Commodore ; “but you know my word is pledged to M. Paul d'Aspremont.”

“That may be, and yet there are cases

where promises have been retracted ; for instance, when it is pledged to a man who subsequently turns out to be an altogether different personage from what he seemed to be at first."

" I beg of you, Comte, to speak plainer ; I do not understand you."

" I dislike the idea of accusing a rival, but you must certainly understand what I have reference to from the hints I let fall at our last meeting. If you had M. Paul d'Aspremont out of the way, would you accept me for a son-in-law ? "

" As far as I am concerned I would be delighted ; but it is not at all likely that Miss Ward would like any such substitution. She is head over ears in love with this Paul ; it is partly my fault, as I encouraged the lad before I got wind of these stories—I beg your pardon, Comte, but I am hardly accountable for my words this morning."

" Then you really wish your niece to die ? " demanded d'Altavilla, seriously.

" Thunder and lightning ! my niece die ! " exclaimed the Commodore, springing from his chair and hurling aside the morocco-covered tube of the houka. " Is she then dangerously ill ? "

" Don't alarm yourself, milord ; Miss Alicia may live, and live very long at that."

“Bravo! that’s the way I like to hear, you talk; you almost took my breath away—you fairly struck me amidships.”

“But on one condition,” added the Comte d’Altavilla; “and that is, that she never again lays eyes on M. Paul d’Aspremont.”

“Ah! the subject of the fascino is again cropping out! Unfortunately, Miss Ward does not believe in it.”

“Listen to me,” continued the Comte, not at all dismayed by the old Commodore’s want of sympathy. “When I first met Miss Alicia at the ball given by the Prince of Syracuse, and I conceived this ardent passion for her, I was smitten by the healthy, robust appearance of your niece. Her beauty was fairly dazzling, and it eclipsed that of other English, Russian, and Italian belles. To the British air of distinction was added the noble grace of the ancient goddesses; pardon this mythology on the part of a descendant of a Greek colony.”

“She was indeed superb! Miss Edwina O’Herty, Lady Eleanor Lilly, Miss Jane Strangford, and the Princess Véra Fédorowna Bariatinski were so envious that they almost had an attack of jaundice,” the Commodore approvingly remarked.

“And have you not noticed that her former beauty has been replaced by a jaded, worn-

out appearance, that her features have lost some of their remarkable symmetry, and that the veins of her hand are plainly visible through her clear white skin, while her voice has a strange though, melodious vibration? The terrestrial appearance has been replaced by an angelic being. Miss Alicia is rapidly assuming that beautiful, though ethereal appearance I do not fancy in worldly beings."

What the Comte said agreed exactly with the Commodore's secret impressions, and he remained as if in a dream for some little time.

"All this is quite true; and although I frequently try to pretend that it is a mere freak of my imagination, I cannot dispute the truth of your assertion."

"Pardon me," interrupted the Comte, "but did you remark any of these symptoms previous to M. d'Aspremont's arrival in England?"

"Never! she was the heartiest and gayest lass in the three kingdoms."

"M. d'Aspremont's presence therefore tallies with the periodical attacks which have so affected Miss Ward's health. I do not ask you to place faith in the quaint superstition of our country, but you will certainly agree that these strange facts are deserving of your attention—"

"But Alicia—her illness may result from



natural causes after all," said the Commodore, partly convinced by d'Altavilla's reasoning, although his English pride struggled against the popular Neapolitan belief.

"Miss Ward is not ill; she is being poisoned by M. d'Aspremont's glance, which, if it does not possess the fascino of the jettatore, is at all events fatal."

"What can I do? She loves Paul; she laughs at the superstition of the fascino, and claims that one can not give such an excuse to a man of honor for refusal."

"I have no right to occupy myself with your niece's affairs; I am neither her brother, her cousin, nor her affianced husband; but, if I obtain your permission, I will make a desperate effort to save her from this fatal influence. Oh! do not be alarmed; I will do nothing rash; although I am quite young, I am old enough to realize the injustice of causing a scandal where a young lady is concerned; but, I beg of you, don't question me as to the plan I propose to pursue—that is my secret. I trust, however, you have sufficient confidence in my honor to believe that I will act as discreetly and honorably as possible."

"Then you love my niece very much?" asked Sir Joshua.

"Yes, then, I love her, though I have no

hope ; but kindly grant me the right to act as I see fit in this affair."

"You are a terrible man, Comte. Very well ! you have my permission to do as you see fit. Try to save Alicia—that is all I ask you."

The Comte bowed politely, and, entering his carriage, he directed the coachman to drive to the Hotel de Rome.

Paul, with his elbows on the table, was plunged in deep thought ; he had seen the drop of blood discolor Alicia's handkerchief, and was convinced that he alone was to blame. He reproached himself with his murderous love ; he blamed himself for accepting the devotion of this beautiful young girl who was determined to die for him, and he asked himself by what superhuman sacrifice he could repay this sublime abnegation.

Paddy interrupted him in his reverie by presenting the Comte d'Altavilla's card.

"The Comte d'Altavilla ! what brings him here ?" questioned Paul, taken completely by surprise at this unexpected visit. "Show him in."

When the Neapolitan appeared on the threshold of the door, M. d'Aspremont had already assumed the mask of indifference under which men of the world conceal their impressions.

With marked politeness, he pointed to an arm-chair, while he seated himself on a lounge and waited patiently, with his eyes fixed on the visitor, for the latter to begin.

“Monsieur,” began the Comte as he played with the charms on his watch-chain, “what I have to say is so strange, so out of place, and so unbecoming that you have the right to throw me out of the window. I trust, however, you will spare me this brutal treatment, as I am prepared to render you reparation when and where you please.”

“I am listening, monsieur, and accept the offer you make me in case your conversation displeases me,” replied Paul, without moving a muscle of his face.

“You are a jettatore !”

At these words, a greenish tinge spread o'er Paul's countenance, a red aureole encircled his eyes ; his eyebrows drew closer together, the furrow in his forehead grew larger, while his eyes darted forth flashes of lightning ; he raised himself partly in his chair, tearing the lining away in his nervous grasp. The spectacle was so terrible that d'Altavilla, brave man though he was, seized one of the little coral branches on his chain and instinctively brought the sharp point to bear upon his *vis-à-vis*.

By a superhuman effort, M. d'Aspremont

regained his self-possession and remarked :

“ You were right, monsieur ; you are entitled to the reward you spoke of for such an insult ; but I will bide my time to obtain a more suitable reparation.”

“ Believe me,” responded the Comte, “ I would not have permitted myself to offer to a gentleman such an insult, which can only be wiped out in blood, unless I had a serious reason for so doing. I love Miss Alicia Ward.”

“ What matters this to me ? ”

“ As you say, it matters very little to you, for she loves you ; but I, Don Felipe d’Altavilla, forbid you to call upon Miss Ward again.”

“ I have no orders to receive from you.”

“ I know it,” replied the Neapolitan ; “ And I certainly do not expect that you will obey me.”

“ Then what other motive has prompted you to speak thus ? ” asked Paul.

“ I am convinced that the fascino by which you have involuntarily charmed Miss Ward has resulted most unfortunately for her. It is an absurd idea, a prejudice worthy of the dark ages—I will not discuss this with you. In spite of yourself your eyes have directed themselves upon Miss Ward, and you are kill-

ing her with your fatal glance. There is no other way to avoid this sad catastrophe than by seeking a quarrel. If we had lived in the sixteenth century I would have ordered my tenants to strangle you in the maintains, but these customs are now out of date. At first I thought seriously of requesting you to return to France ; but that was too simple ; you would have laughed at a rival who would have thus coolly asked you to go away, leaving him alone with your fiancée, on the ground that you were a jettatore."

While the Comte d'Altavilla was speaking, Paul d'Aspremont was a victim of the most violent emotions. Was it really possible that he, a Christian, was in the devil's clutches, and that the light of Hell shone from his eyes ? That he planted the seeds of destruction along his path, and that his love for the dearest and purest woman on earth would eventually cause her death ! For a moment his reason tottered, and his brain throbbed as if it would burst his cranium.

" Upon your honor, Comte, do you believe what you say to be true ? " exclaimed d'Aspremont, after a short silence which the Neapolitan respected.

" Upon my honor, such is my belief."

" Oh, then it is true ! " muttered Paul to himself. I am therefore an assassin, a demon,

a vampire ! I am killing this sweet creature, breaking the old Commodore's heart !" and he was on the point of promising the Comte that he would not attempt to see Alicia again ; but pride and jealousy asserted themselves and froze the words on his lips.

" Comte, I hereby warn you that I will call on Miss Ward the moment you have taken your departure."

" I will not seize you by the collar to prevent your going ; however, I will be delighted to meet you to-morrow morning, at six o'clock, in the ruins of Pompeii, near the thermæ, if you have no objection. What weapon do you prefer ?—you are the offended party—the sword, sabre, or pistol ? "

" We will fight with knives and blindfolded, separated by a handkerchief the ends of which we will hold in our left hands. We must equalize the chances—I am a jettatore ; I could kill you with a glance, monsieur le Comte ! "

And Paul d'Aspremont, bursting into a harsh laugh, opened the door and disappeared.

## CHAPTER XII.

- ALICIA had taken up her quarters in one of the rooms on the ground floor of the villa,
- the walls of which were frescoed according to

the style prevalent in Italy, where very little wall-paper is used. Manilla mats covered the floor; on a table, over which a piece of Turkish carpet was thrown, lay the poetical works of Coleridge, Shelley, Tennyson, and Longfellow; a mirror, set in an antique frame, and a few cane-bottomed chairs completed the furniture of the room. Window-shades of Chinese bamboo, on which were designed dragons, snakes, and all kinds of quaint birds, gave a soft light to the apartment.

The young girl, who was far from well, was reclining on a narrow lounge near the window; two or three Morocco cushions supported her; a Venetian cover was thrown over her feet, and thus prepared, she could receive Paul without in the least offending the rules of English etiquette.

The book she had been reading had slipped from her hand; her eyes wandered aimlessly beneath her long, silken lashes and seemed to be gazing into another world; she experienced that lassitude which always follows the fever, and was engaged in chewing the leaves of an orange-tree which stretched its fragrant branches, covered with blossoms, through the open window. Is there not a painting of Venus chewing rose-leaves? What a charming companion a modern artist could have painted to this old Venetian picture, repre-

sending Alicia munching the orange-blossoms!

She was thinking of M. d'Aspremont, and she wondered whether she would live to see the day when she would be his wife; not that she dreaded the fatal influence of the fascino, but she felt herself giving way to strange presentiments: that very night she had a dream, and she had not yet recovered from its effects.

In her dream, she fancied herself lying in bed awake, her eyes riveted on the open door of her room, where she momentarily expected *some one* to appear. After two or three minutes of anxious expectation a white and sylph-like form made its appearance, enveloped in a white cloud, gradually becoming more distinct as it approached the bed.

The apparition was clothed in a dress of white muslin, the folds of which trailed on the ground; long tresses of black hair fell about the pale, white face, while two little red spots were plainly visible on her cheeks. In her hand the apparition held a flower, a tea-rose, the petals of which, as they fell on the floor, resembled so many tears.

Alicia did not know her mother, who had died a year after her birth; but she had frequently stood in silent contemplation before a faded miniature of Nancy Ward, and



from the resemblance she realized that it was her mother who stood before her now : the white dress, the black hair, the white cheeks tinted with pink, even the tea-rose were reproduced as she had seen them in the portrait—only it was the miniature enlarged and developed to life-size, an animated, moving picture as one usually beholds in a dream.

A feeling of tenderness mingled with fear seized Alicia. She wanted to stretch her arms out to the phantom, but she was unable to move them, heavy as marble, from the pillow on which they were resting. She attempted to speak, but her tongue refused to articulate.

Nancy, after having placed the tea-rose on the table, kneeled beside the bed and laid her head on Alicia's breast, listening to the respiration of the lungs and counting the heart-beats. The cold touch of the apparition gave the young girl, alarmed by this silent auscultation, the sensation of a piece of ice.

The apparition rose, and casting a loving passionate glance at the young girl, began to count the leaves of the rose, most of which had fallen out,—then whispered : “ There is only one more—one more.”

A heavy pall arose between the sleeper and the vision, and it disappeared in the darkness as Alicia dropped off to sleep.

Had her mother's spirit come to warn her? What significance was attached to the mysterious words, "There is only one more—one more," as whispered by the apparition? Was this pale, drooping rose the symbol of her life? This strange dream, with its horrible yet charming details, this beautiful spectre draped in muslin which counted the petals of the faded flower, filled the young girl's breast with fear, a cloud of sadness gathered about her lovely forehead, and strange thoughts occupied her mind.

This orange-branch which shook out its blossoms in profusion about her had something mournful about it as well. Were the little white stars therefore not destined to glisten on her bridal veil? With a movement of horror, Alicia withdrew the flower she was biting from her lips—the blossom was already discolored and faded. . . .

The time for M. d'Aspremont's expected visit drew near. Miss Ward struggled bravely against the feeling that oppressed her; she passed her hand through her hair and readjusted the folds of her scarf, while she picked up the fallen book in order to appear engaged when the visitor should make his appearance.

Paul arrived at last, and Miss Ward welcomed him with a forced laugh, as she did not

wish to alarm him for fear he would accuse himself as being the cause of her illness. The scene he had just had with the Comte d'Altavilla gave Paul a savage and irritated appearance, which caused Vicè to make the cabalistic sign, but Alicia's loving smile soon dispelled the clouds which had gathered about his brow.

"I hope you are not seriously ill, Alicia," he said as he seated himself beside her."

"Oh, it is nothing, I assure you; I am a little tired, that is all: the sirocco paid us a visit yesterday, and that African wind is always too much for me. Just you wait until we get back to Lincolnshire and you shall see how well I am! Now that I have recovered my strength, I will take my turn at the oars as we take our daily row on the lake!"

As she said this she could not restrain a convulsive cough.

M. d'Aspremont turned pale and lowered his eyes.

A long silence ensued. Alicia was the first to speak.

"I have never given you anything, Paul," she said as she removed a plain gold band from her wasted finger; "take this ring and wear it in memory of me; it will fit you, as your hand is no larger than a woman's.

Good-bye! I don't feel well and I would like to sleep a little. Come and see me to-morrow."

Paul withdrew with a heavy heart; the efforts made by Alicia to conceal her suffering were useless; he loved Miss Ward to distraction, and yet he was killing her. Was not this ring she had just given him, a pledge that they would meet in the next world?

He walked up and down the beach like a madman, dreaming of flight. He contemplated entering a Trappist convent, there to await his death seated on his coffin, without ever raising the cowl of his frock. It seemed as if he was cowardly and ungrateful, not to sacrifice his love, and to cease this abuse of Alicia's heroism: for she knew everything, she was aware that he was a jettatore, as the Comte d'Altavilla had already proclaimed him to be, and, seized by an angelic desire to do good, she did not spurn his love!

"Yes," said he, "this Neapolitan, this handsome comte she scorns, really loves her. His passion is nobler than mine: to save Alicia, he has not feared to approach me in order to provoke me—me, a jettatore, that is to say, in his opinion, a being to be dreaded as much as the devil himself. While speaking to me, he toyed with the charms on his watch-chain, and the eyes of this celebrated duelist, who

has killed three men in his time, lowered themselves before mine ! ”

On reaching the Hotel de Rome, Paul wrote a number of letters, and then made his will, in which he bequeathed to Miss Alicia Ward all his worldly possessions, with the exception of a legacy for Paddy.

Then he opened the oak chest in which he kept his weapons ; it was separated into little compartments in which were placed swords, pistols, and hunting-knives. He selected two Corsican stilettos, of equal size, after due deliberation.

They were long, two-edged blades of finely-tempered Damascus steel, curious and terrible weapons in the hands of desperate men. Paul also selected three silk scarfs of equal length.

He then notified Scazzigo to be in readiness to drive him into the country early in the morning.

“ Oh ! ” he exclaimed, throwing himself upon his bed, “ may God will it that this combat proves fatal to me ! For if I have the good fortune to be killed—Alicia will live ! ”

## CHAPTER XIII.

POMPEII, the dead city, does not wake up at daybreak like the living cities, and although she has partly thrown aside the mantle of cinders which had covered her during so many centuries, she still sleeps on her funeral pyre long after the sun has risen in the heavens.

The tourists of all nations, who visit the city of the dead during the day, are still soundly sleeping in their beds, all worn out with the exertions of their excursions, and as the sun rises over the gigantic tomb it does not light up a single human entrance. The lizards, alone, wriggle their tails as they glide along the walls or over disjointed mosaics, without stopping to read the *cave canem* inscribed on the doors of the deserted houses. These are the inhabitants who have succeeded the ancient citizens, and it seems as if Pompeii had been exhumed solely for their benefit.

It is a strange sight to behold in the dim light of morning—the skeleton of this city, which was destroyed in the midst of its pleasures, its work, and its civilization. One momentarily expects to see the proprietors of

these deserted houses appear in the doorway attired in Greek or Roman costume, and the chariots, of which the tracks are plainly discernible on the flag-stones, to move ; the tipplers enter the thermopoles, where the marks of the cups are still imprinted on the marble counter. One walks as in a dream through the past ; the bill of the spectacle in red letters is posted on the walls—only the spectacle has taken place more than seventeen centuries ago ! In the uncertain light of the morning, the figures of the dancing girls, painted on the walls, seem to wave their crotalums as they raise the thin drapery with the tips of their toes, believing, no doubt, that the torch bearers would light up the triclinium for an orgie ; the Venuses, the Satyrs, and the heroic or grotesque figures, animated by a ray of light, apparently replaced the dispersed inhabitants, as they gave an almost realistic appearance to the deserted city. The colored shadows flicker on the walls, and for several minutes the mind willingly lends itself to this ancient phantasmagoria. But that morning, to the great surprise of the lizards, the usual matinal serenity of Pompeii was disturbed by a strange visitor : a carriage drove up to the former main entrance of the city, and Paul, alighting, directed his steps towards the rendezvous on foot.

He was so deeply absorbed, however, that he did not heed this city of fallen grandeur. Was it the thought of the impending combat which preoccupied him thus? Not at all. He was not even thinking of that; his thoughts were far away. In his mind he recalled his first meeting with Miss Ward in Richmond; she was dressed in white, and had a bunch of jasmine blossoms in her hair. How young, how beautiful and sprightly she had seemed to him then!

The ancient baths are at the end of the Consular quarter, near the residence of Diomedes and Mammia's sepulchre; M. d'Aspremont had no difficulty in finding them. It was here that the women of Pompeii used to come after the bath to dry their beautiful bodies, readjust their head-dresses, and resume their tunics and their stereotyped smiles in the polished brass mirrors of the period. Quite another scene was to be enacted in the thermæ, and blood would stain the marble mosaics where perfumed waters once were wont to flow.

A few moments later Comte d'Altavilla appeared. He carried a pistol case in his hand, and two swords under his arm. He did not believe the conditions proposed by M. d'Aspremont to be serious; he looked upon them purely as a bit of mephistophelean sarcasm.



“What do you intend doing with these pistols and swords, Comte?” questioned Paul. “I thought we had fully agreed on the weapons we are to use?”

“Undoubtedly; but I thought it quite possible that you would change your mind. No one has ever fought such a duel as you propose.”

“Even were we fully equal in skill, I would have an advantage over you,” replied Paul with a bitter smile; “and I do not wish to abuse this advantage. Here are a couple of Corsican stiletos; pray examine them—they are of equal weight and length—and here a couple of silk scarfs with which to blindfold ourselves. See, they are very thick, and *my glance* will hardly pierce the material.”

The Comte d’Altavilla nodded his head approvingly.

“We have no witnesses,” continued Paul, “and one of us must never leave this vault alive. Let us each write a note, attesting the loyalty of the duel; the victor will pin it on the dead man’s breast.”

“A wise precaution,” answered the Neapolitan with a smile, as he traced a few lines on a page of Paul’s memorandum book, after which the latter went through the same formality.

This accomplished, the two adversaries,

flinging aside their coats, proceeded to blindfold themselves, and, arming themselves with their stiletos, they each took a firm hold on the silk scarf.

“Are you ready?” asked M. d’Aspremont of the Comte d’Altavilla.

“Yes,” replied the Neapolitan, who was perfectly composed.

Don Felipe d’Altavilla’s bravery was not to be questioned; all he feared was the jettatura, and this blind combat, from which other men would have recoiled in horror, did not give him the slightest fear. He simply staked his life at head or tails, without being compelled to undergo the torture of having his foe’s fatal glance directed upon him.

The duellists flourished their stiletos, and the scarf which linked them together was strained to its utmost tension. By an instinctive movement, both Paul and the Comte had thrown their bodies backward, the only attitude possible in such a duel; their arms circled through the empty air, and that was all.

This blind struggle, where each had a presentiment of death without seeing it coming, was indeed terrible. Silently and furiously the two foes retreated, sprang forward and retreated again, at times almost upsetting one another in the darkness, as they struck out

again and again with their stiletto without injuring each other.

At one moment, d'Altavilla felt the point of his stiletto striking against something ; he halted, supposing that he killed his rival, and waited for the sound of his falling body ;— but he had only struck the wall !

“ By Heaven ! I thought I had run you through,” he exclaimed, as he recovered his guard.

“ Do not speak,” said Paul, “ your voice guides me.”

And the combat recommenced.

Suddenly the rivals felt themselves detached from one another. A blow of Paul's stiletto had severed the scarf.

“ A truce !” exclaimed the Neapolitan ; “ the scarf has parted ! ”

“ What matters that ? Let us continue,” replied Paul.

A painful silence followed. Like honorable men that they were, neither M. d'Aspremont nor the Comte wished to take advantage of the sound of the voice caused by this brief exchange of words, to precipitate the attack. They took a few paces to one side in order to throw each other off the track, then they retraced their steps and began hunting for each other in the darkness.

Paul displaced a little stone with his foot ;

this slight noise revealed to the Neapolitan the direction his foe was taking. Raising himself on his tiptoes in order to obtain more momentum, Altavilla bounded forward with the fury of a tiger, and brought up against M. d'Aspremont's stiletto.

Paul touched the point of his weapon—it was wet—unsteady steps resounded on the flag-stones ; a heavy sigh was heard, followed by the noise of a falling body.

Terrified beyond measure, Paul tore the handkerchief from his eyes, and beheld the Comte d'Altavilla, pale and motionless, stretched out on his back, his shirt stained with his life-blood.

The handsome Neapolitan was dead !

M. d'Aspremont placed the note d'Altavilla had written, attesting the loyalty of the combat, on his breast, and left the thermæ with a heavy heart, while his face was even whiter than that of the dead nobleman who was lying there on the cold marble slabs.

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#### CHAPTER XIV.

TOWARDS two o'clock in the afternoon, a number of English tourists visited the ruins of Pompeii ; the party, which was composed of the father, mother, three daugh-

ters, two little boys and a cousin, had already cast a careless look about the ruins, characteristic of the British *ennui*, almost without halting to admire the grandeur of the amphitheatre, and of the theatres, so curiously juxtaposed ; of the military quarters, chalked with caricatures by the guards during their leisure moments ; the forum, the temples of Venus and Jupiter, the basilica and the Pantheon. They silently studied their *Murrays*, while the cicerone eloquently described the ruins, and they scarcely condescended to notice the broken columns, the fragments of statues, the mosaics, the frescoes, and the inscriptions.

They finally reached the ancient baths, discovered in 1824, as the guide saw fit to remark. "Here were the vapor baths, there the boiler in which the water was heated, and, further on, the drying room"; these details given in the Neapolitan *patois*, mixed with a few sentences in broken English, evidently did not interest the visitors, for they were going to take their departure, when suddenly Miss Ethelwina, the eldest of the daughters, a charming blonde with freckled face, started back, partly through fear and partly through modesty, as she cried out : "A man !"

"It is no doubt some workman employed by the government to unearth the ruins, who is

taking his afternoon *siesta*, so don't be alarmed, my lady," said the guide, as he applied the tip of his boot to the inanimate body stretched out at full length on the ground. "Hola! I say there, wake up, you lazy clown, and permit their graces to pass."

But the sleeper did not stir.

"The man is not asleep—he is dead," said one of the sons who was in advance of the party.

The cicerone stooped down, but he started back in horror as he exclaimed :

"The man has been murdered !"

"It is positively shocking that one is compelled to look upon such ghastly objects; Ethelwina, Kitty, Bessie, stand aside," remarked Mrs. Bracebridge; "it is not proper for young ladies to look at such a disgusting sight. Haven't they any police in this country? The coroner should have removed the body long ago."

"Ah! a paper!" laconically remarked the cousin, a long-legged, awkward fellow after the style of the Laird of Dumbiedike in "The Edinburgh Jail."

"So it is," added the guide, as he picked up the paper on d'Altavilla's breast; "and there is writing on it, too."

"Then read it," exclaimed the tourists as with one voice, their curiosity being aroused.

“ It is useless to seek or annoy any one on account of my death. If this note is found on my wound I shall have fallen in a fair duel.

(*Signed*) FELIPE, Comte d'Altavilla.

“ He was a gentleman after all ; what a pity ! ” sighed Mrs. Bracebridge, impressed by the title.

“ And such a handsome man,” murmured Miss Ethelwina, the young lady with the freckles.

“ Surely, you can't complain now,” whispered Bessie to Kitty ; “ you are always grumbling because we have had such an uninteresting voyage ; we have not, it is true, been stopped by brigands on the road from Terracine to Fondi, but we have found a young nobleman, pierced through the heart by a blow from a stiletto in the ruins of Pompeii—and that ought to be romantic enough, I'm sure. Some love affair is back of this, no doubt, and we will have something startling to tell our friends on our return. I will sketch the scene in my album, and you will add a few mournful verses, *à la* Byron.”

“ I don't care,” interrupted the guide, “ it was a fair blow—he was struck square in the heart ; there is no fault to be found.”

Such was the funeral oration of the Comte d'Altavilla.

Some workmen, notified by the cicerone, hurried off to warn the authorities, and the body of the unfortunate Comte was carried to his chateau near Salerno.

As to M. d'Aspremont, he had regained his carriage, and, although his eyes were wide open, he could not see—he walked like a somnambulist in his sleep. He was like an animated statue. Although he was inspired with religious horror at the sight of the dead man, still he did not consider himself guilty. Provoked by the Comte to fight, he had no other course to pursue than to accept, and yet he had only decided to fight in the hope that he would be the victim. Gifted with a fatal glance, he had insisted that both combatants should be blindfolded so that fate alone should be responsible for the result. He had not even struck the blow ; his enemy had impaled himself upon his weapon ! He bemoaned the death of the Comte d'Altavilla precisely as he would have done had he not been accountable for his death. "It is my stiletto that killed him," he reasoned, "but if I had looked at him in a ball-room one of the chandeliers would have fallen on him from the ceiling and would have crushed him beneath its weight. I am as innocent as the lightning, the avalanche, or the machineel tree—as unconscious, in fact, of the harm I



occasion as any of these destructive powers. The lightning, however, is not aware that it kills, while I, an intelligent creature, know the fatal power I possess. It seems as if I had no right to linger on this earth where I cause so many misfortunes! Would God damn me forever if I committed suicide in order to save my fellow-beings from destruction? It seems as if this would be pardonable in the present case. But what if I should be mistaken? Then I could not even look upon Alicia in the next world, where the eyes of the souls are not accursed with the fatal fascino. This is a chance I don't propose to run."

A sudden thought flashed through the mind of the unfortunate jettatore and interrupted his reverie. His features seemed to grow softer, and they relaxed their severity as they assumed an expression of determination. He had taken a final resolution.

"A curse be on my eyes, since they are murderous! but, before closing forever, saturate yourselves with light, gaze on the sun, on the blue sky, the immense sea, and the chains of mountains: contemplate the green trees, the infinite horizon, the columns of the palace, the fisherman's hut; the far-off islands of the gulf, the white sails which brighten the horizon, and Vesuvius with her smoking

crater; gaze upon all these sights, and remember them well, for you will never feast upon this beautiful vision again; study every form, and every color—treat yourselves to this gorgeous spectacle, intoxicate yourselves with the beauties of the earth—for it is for the last time! 'Go on! enjoy yourselves! The curtain will soon fall between you and the picturesque scenery and the beauties of the universe!'

At this moment the carriage was following the beach; the beautiful bay was looking at its best, and the sky seemed to have been sculptured out of a single block of sapphire.

Paul asked the driver to stop, and, getting out of the carriage, he seated himself on a rock, from whence he gazed long and earnestly at the surroundings as if he wished to impress them upon his memory. His eyes bathed themselves in the light, and the sun, shining brighter than ever, seemed to impart some of its brilliancy to them! There would be no dawn to the night which was to follow!

Tearing himself away from this silent contemplation, M. d'Aspremont entered the carriage and directed Scazziga to drive to the white villa near Sorrento.

He found Alicia reclining on the lounge, exactly as he had left her the day before. Paul seated himself opposite to her, but this

time he did not lower his eyes as he had been accustomed to do since he first acquired the knowledge of his fatal power.

Alicia's beauty was perfect even in her agony ; the woman had almost disappeared, making way for the angelic being. Her skin was transparent, ethereal, and luminous ; one could see her soul shining through the frail form like the light of an alabaster lamp. Her eyes had the tender blue of the sky in them, and scintillated like two bright stars ; life scarcely placed its red signature upon the carnation of her lips.

A divine smile illuminated her mouth, like a ray of the sun about a rose, as her affianced husband turned his eyes lovingly upon her. She imagined that Paul had at last dismissed the thought that he was accursed from his mind, and she once more beheld the Paul of former days. She held out her pale, wan hand, which he eagerly clasped in his own.

"So you are no longer afraid of me?" she said with a sweet smile, as Paul continued to gaze upon her.

"Oh ! let me look at you," answered M. d'Aspremont in a strange tone, kneeling beside the sofa ; "let my eyes feast themselves upon your intoxicating beauty !" and he contemplated Alicia's raven-black hair, her white

brow, which was as pure as Grecian marble, her dark blue eyes, her finely shaped nose, her mouth with its two rows of pearls, and her swan-like neck; he seemed to make a note of every feature and every detail, like a painter who desires to retain a picture in his mind.

Alicia was fascinated by his burning glance, and experienced a painful, almost fatal sensation—the dying embers of her life were fanned into a momentary flame; she turned red and white by turns, and from ice she suddenly turned to fire. Another moment, and her soul would have left her forever.

She placed her hands over Paul's eyes, but the young man's glance darted through her transparent fingers like a flash of lightning.

"Now that I have seen her again, what care I for my eyesight? Her portrait is imprinted upon my heart," Paul muttered as he took his departure.

That night, after having gazed at the setting sun—the last sunset he would ever behold—M. d'Aspremont rang for a chafing-dish and some charcoal.

"I wonder if he is going to asphyxiate himself?" grumbled Virgilio Falsacappa as he handed Paddy the coal and the chafing-dish his master had sent for. "It's about the best thing the cursed jettatore could do!"

But such was not d'Aspremont's intention, for he opened the window and, lighting the coals, plunged the blade of a stiletto into the flame.

The fine blade, embedded 'as it was in this incandescent heat, was soon red-hot. Paul leaned on the mantelpiece and gazed at himself in the mirror.

“Farewell, accursed features ! this horrible mask will soon disappear forever ! I am going to plunge you into the darkness of the night, and before long I shall have forgotten your fatal charm as completely as though it had never existed. It will be useless to cry out, ‘Hubert, Hubert, my poor eyes !’ for that will not alter my determination. Now then, to work !” and casting one last, sweeping glance in the mirror he approached the lighted fire.

He blew his breath upon the embers, and took the dagger by the handle, the blade of which emitted little white sparks.

At this decisive moment, although fully determined to carry his plan into execution, M. d'Aspremont felt his heart sinking within him, while a cold sweat bathed his temples ; but with a superhuman effort he recovered his self-possession, and passed the hot blade before his eyes.

A sharp, tearing, lacerating pain almost

caused him to cry out ; it seemed as if two drops of molten lead had been dropped in his eyes and, burning through his eyeballs, had forced their way to the back of his head ; the flagger fell from his open hand and made a deep burn in the carpet.

A thick, compact darkness, compared with which the darkest night was as daylight, enveloped him in its black mantle ; he turned his head in the direction of the mantelpiece, where the candles were still burning brightly, but an impenetrable, dense obscurity surrounded him on every side. The sacrifice was consummated !

“And now, sweet and noble creature,” murmured Paul, “I can become your husband without the fear of becoming your assassin as well. You will no longer wilt away under the magic fascino of my fatal glance—you will regain your health and former beauty. Alas ! I can no longer see you, it is true, but your sainted image is forever imprinted on my heart ; and although I will see you only in my fancy, still your sweet voice will reach my ear. Sometimes, too, you will let your hand linger in mine to assure me of your presence, you will condescend to lead your poor, blind husband when he falters in the darkness of an eternal night ; you will read poetry and you will describe all the cele-

brated paintings and statues to him. Through the sound of your loving voice, you will restore to him the lost treasures of the world ; you will be his one thought, his only dream ; deprived of the sunlight and the enjoyment of the beauties of this earth, his soul will fly towards you for consolation !

“ I do not regret my sacrifice, since you are saved—and, after all, what have I lost ? The monotonous spectacle of the different seasons, the sight of more or less picturesque places where the hundred different acts of the comedy of life are daily enacted for the edification of millions of souls. The earth, the sky, the sea, the mountains, the trees, the flowers—a vulgar show, a repetition of the same old things day after day ! When one is beloved, one possesses the real sun, the brightness of which is never dimmed by passing clouds ! ”

So spoke the unfortunate Paul d'Aspremont, feverish and delirious with pain and exaltation.

His suffering gradually diminished ; then he dropped off into that heavy sleep which is the brother of death, and which, like death, brings consolation.

He was not aroused by the light of day which streamed through the open curtains of his room. Henceforth, midnight and noon

would be alike to him ; but the clocks chiming the *Angelus* rumbled in his ears, until, becoming gradually more distinct, they awoke him from his drowsiness.

He attempted to move his eyelids, and before he knew it the pain suddenly reminded him of his sacrifice. His eyes encountered nothing but darkness, and it seemed as if he had been buried alive ; but he soon recovered his composure. For was it not destined that his life should be ever thus? Henceforth, the light of the morning and the darkness of the night would be alike to him.

He groped around in the darkness for the bell-rope, and Paddy made his appearance in answer to this summons.

“ I foolishly slept with the window open,” said Paul, in order to avoid an explanation, “ and I believe I have caught the gutta serena, but it will soon pass away, I suppose. Kindly lead me to the basin and fill a tumbler with fresh water forthwith.”

Paddy, with the discretion so becoming in an English valet, made no comment, and, after executing his master’s commands, retired.

Left to himself, Paul dipped his handkerchief in the cold water and applied it to his eyes in order to cool the burn.

We will leave M. d’Aspremont, thus pain-



fully occupied, while we will rejoin some of the other personages who have figured in this story.

The news of Comte d'Altavilla's strange death spread like wildfire through the city and was the subject of a thousand different conjectures. The Comte's ability as a swordsman was well known. D'Altavilla had the reputation of being one of the best fencers of the Neapolitan school; he had killed three men, and he had seriously wounded five or six more. The most celebrated duellists, therefore, took particular pains not to offend him. Now, if one of these swaggerers had killed d'Altavilla, he certainly would not have hesitated to proclaim his prowess. And yet the note found on his body diverted all thoughts of murder. At first the handwriting was questioned, but it was compared to some of his letters by experts, who pronounced the writing to be the same. Again, the handkerchief tied about his head could in no way be accounted for. Then, two stiletos were found in the ruins near the body, while a couple of swords and pistols were discovered a little further off.

The news of his death finally reached Vicè's ears, and she lost no time in informing Sir Joshua Ward. The Commodore suddenly remembered his conversation with d'Altavilla,

when the latter mysteriously hinted that he had a plan by which Alicia could be saved. In his imagination, he beheld the Comte and M. d'Aspremont engaged in the deadly struggle. As to Vicè, she did not hesitate to attribute the death of the handsome Neapolitan to the fatal influence of the fascino. And yet, Paul had paid his respects to Miss Ward at the usual hour, and there was nothing in his appearance to betray the part he had acted in the terrible drama ; on the contrary, he appeared even more gay than usual.

M. d'Aspremont did not call that day, and the news of the Comte's death was carefully withheld from Alicia.

Paul did not wish to present himself with his red eyes, as he proposed to attribute his sudden blindness to another cause. The following day, however, his eyes having ceased to pain him, he asked Paddy to accompany him for a drive.

The carriage stopped, as usual, before the terrace. The blind man kicked open the door with his foot, and was soon treading the well-known path. Vicè had not hastened to meet him as was her wont when the bell, set in motion by the opening and closing of the door, notified her of the approach of a visitor ; none of the joyful sounds which formerly burst upon his ear reached him now, but

instead a frightful, death-like silence reigned supreme. This silence, which would have oppressed even a man who could see, struck apprehension and nameless fear to the heart of the poor, groping Paul.

The branches which he could no longer see appeared anxious to retain him; they stretched forth, like so many arms, attempting to bar his passage. The laurel-bushes got in his way, the rose-bushes fastened themselves on his clothes, the vines seized him about the legs, while the birds seemed to twitter, "Why do you come here, poor unfortunate? Do not attempt to force your way through the obstructions nature has placed in your path—go away!" But Paul did not heed the warning, and, tormented by a terrible presentiment, he hurled himself against the opposing shrubbery—heedless of the laurel and the rose bushes he destroyed in his mad onslaught—while he continued to force his way toward the villa.

Torn and scratched by the overhanging branches, he finally reached the end of the arbor. A gust of fresh air struck him in the face, and he continued his way with his hands stretched out before him.

He found the wall, and finally the door, after a difficult search.

He entered; no kindly voice gave him a

welcome. There was no sound to guide him. For a moment he stood, hesitating, in the doorway. An odor of ether, of wax in combustion, and the aromatic perfumes of a death-chamber reached the intruder's nostrils as he stood there, hesitating and trembling on the threshold ; a frightful thought suddenly crossed his mind, and he entered the room.

He advanced a few steps—then he struck against something which fell on the floor with a loud noise. Stooping down, he took it up : by its touch he recognized it to be a long metallic candlestick, similar to the ones used in churches.

With throbbing heart, he continued his way through the darkness. He seemed to hear a voice offering up a prayer to Heaven ; he took another step forward, and his hands encountered the foot-board of a bed ; he leaned over, and his fingers touched a motionless body at first ; then a wreath of roses and a face as pure and cold as marble.

It was Alicia laid out in her funeral robes.

“Dead !” shrieked Paul, as he realized the truth at last ; “dead ! and it is I who have killed her !”

The Commodore, frozen with horror, had seen this spectre, with its sightless eyes, as it staggered across the room, and finally came

to a standstill before the bed in which his niece was lying : he had understood.

The grandeur of this useless sacrifice caused the tears to rush to the old man's eyes.

Paul fell on his knees beside the bed, while he covered Alicia's cold hand with burning, passionate kisses ; his body shook with emotion. His sorrow even moved the ferocious Vicè, who stood respectfully by the side of the bed, watching her mistress's last sleep.

After he had bid his love farewell, M. d'Aspremont rose and, advancing towards the door, went out. His eyes, which were wide open, exposing the red scar caused by the burns, presented an unnatural expression ; although he was blind, one would have believed he had the gift of sight. He crossed the terrace, without halting once, and walked out into the country, sometimes disturbing a stone with his foot, and sometimes stopping as if to catch a distant sound—but he continued on his way.

The noise made by the waves as they washed ashore grew more distinct, while the sea-gulls uttered plaintive cries which sounded mournfully indeed as the sighing of the wind and the rush of the waters burst upon his ear.

Paul was soon standing on an overhanging

rock. The rolling of the waves, and the salted rain which beat upon his face should have warned him of the danger he was running; but he heeded not the warning; a strange smile flitted across his pale lips, and he continued on his way, although he knew the gulf was beneath his feet.

Suddenly, he lost his balance and fell; a gigantic wave seized him in its embrace and carried him backwards in its mad rush.

Then the storm burst forth in all its fury; the waves beat upon the beach in rapid succession, like a phalanx of cavalry storming a fortress, while they cast the spray high into the air; the black clouds, tinged with fire, emitted sulphurous vapors; the crater of Vesuvius grew brighter, and a variegated cloud hovered over the volcano. The barks anchored off the shore collided together with a mournful sound, while their cables, strained to their utmost tension, creaked ominously. Then the rain began to fall in torrents, cutting the faces of the people like so much fine glass—it seemed as if the chaos wished to conquer nature and once more confound the elements.

M. Paul d'Aspremont's body was never found, although the Commodore offered a large reward for its recovery.

An ebony coffin, with silver handles, lined

with quilted satin—in fact, just such a coffin as Clarissa Harlowe recommend<sup>d</sup> to the care of “the carpenter,”—was taken on board a yacht by the Commodore and carried to England, where it was plac<sup>d</sup> in the family vault in Lincolnshire. It contained all that was earthly of Miss Alicia Ward, who was beautiful even in death.

A remarkable change has taken place in the Commodore. His superb *embonpoint* has completely disappeared. He no longer takes Jamaica rum in his tea, eats but little, and has very little to say; and the contrast between his white whiskers and his sunburnt face no longer exists—the Commodore has forever lost his ruddy color.







